

Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts

Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone



ISLAMIC HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION, STUDIES AND TEXTS

EDITED BY

**BEHNAM SADEGHI, ASAD Q. AHMED,
ADAM SILVERSTEIN AND ROBERT HOYLAND**

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Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts

Islamic History and Civilization

STUDIES AND TEXTS

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B R I L L

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Preface

The stature of Patricia Crone in the field of Islamic history is such that many readers will not need a reminder of the importance, range, and originality of her scholarship. Her willingness to question old certainties and the clarity and passion with which she argues for her positions have inspired many younger historians and guaranteed that her works will continue to generate fruitful discussions for decades to come.

We will not give an outline of her scholarship here. Her cv, printed in the following pages, does that. Instead, we would like to mention some of her qualities as a researcher and educator that we consider exemplary. Most of these qualities, we believe, are related to the fact that she is, above all, a seeker and lover of the truth. Some scholars consider talk of “truth” as naïve. Many intellectuals specialize in producing writing that lacks a bottom line and fails to take a position. Yet others believe that historians should not go much beyond describing the evidence. And others freely take nontrivial positions and advocate theories, but do so dogmatically, lacking the stomach to see ideas face the test of the evidence. Crone, however, proceeds in a scientific manner:¹ she puts forward bold historical claims that go far beyond the evidence, as interesting theories must, and then embarks on the crucial process of subjecting theories – opposing ones and her own – to criticism based on the analysis of the available evidence.

Crone’s sharp criticisms of some scholars are in the public record. Less publicly, we know of at least two graduate students whose initial encounters with her reduced them to tears (literally). In both cases, she subsequently took them under her wing as a mentor, continuing to provide them with frank feedback that helped them grow as thinkers and writers. We do not claim – nor would she – that her ideas have always been right; but she is right to use criticism as the means of pursuing the truth. This quality makes her more willing than most people to take seriously criticisms of her work and modify her positions, thus putting the truth and the process of critical inquiry above her ego.

It would be an illusion to think that we could approach scholarship without reading into the evidence world views and premises – fallible presuppositions that are often shaped by education and socialization, our philosophical or ideological commitments, or simply our personalities and idiosyncrasies. Nor is it desirable to eliminate such background assumptions, since they are needed to

¹ We are aware that the word “scientific,” like “truth,” makes some scholars cringe.

bring the dead letter of the evidence to life, and since they may be right.² The real question – the one that distinguishes critical acumen from dogmatism – is whether scholars are conscious of their assumptions, expose them to the test of the evidence, or take seriously other scholars' attempts to do so.³ This question separates scholars who are lodged smugly and obliviously in their fortresses of irrefutability from the intrepid ones, who formulate their ideas in the sharpest and most falsifiable (hence most vulnerable) forms possible, forge out into the open in their quest for the truth, welcoming battle, and in the process often end up somewhere far from where they started. Always searching, questioning, arguing, and delighting in learning, Patricia Crone is that kind of a scholar.

The following essays are gathered in her honor:

Joseph Witztum's essay, "Variant Traditions, Relative Chronology, and the Study of Intra-Quranic Parallels," is about the relative chronology of multiple occurrences of stories in the Qur'an. Focusing on the recurring narrative about the sin of Adam and his mate, he asks whether the relative similarity of one sura to pre-Islamic attestations can provide a clue to its relative chronological order.

Robert Hoyland's essay, "The Earliest Attestation of the *Dhimma* of God and His Messenger and the Rediscovery of P. Nessana 77 (60s AH/680 CE)," produces an edition, translation, and study of two seventh-century Arabic letters on a papyrus. It contains the earliest attested mention of the phrase "the protection of God and His messenger" (*dhimmat Allāh wa-dhimmat rasūlihi*). An appendix by Hannah Cotton accompanies the essay.

Guy Stroumsa's essay, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins," surveys the evidence for the hypothesis that Jewish Christians in Arabia contributed to the shape of the Qur'an and the rise of Islam more generally.

2 There is a vast body of literature on this issue under the headings of the theory-dependence of evidence and the Duhem–Quine problem. For a philosophical analysis that acknowledges the inevitability of ideological influences and their compatibility with testing, learning, and discovery, see Longino, "Can There Be a Feminist Science?", 45–57.

3 The fact that our interpretation of the evidence necessarily depends on theories does not make it impossible to test our theories by evidence. For example, it is not paradoxical to hold that a theory-dependent piece of evidence can be used to test the theory on which the observation was based. It has been demonstrated that "the familiar claim that an observation that depends in an essential way on a theory cannot provide an objective test of that very theory is false" (Brown, "Theory-Laden Observation," 559).

Karen Bauer's essay, "A Note on the Relationship between *Tafsīr* and Common Understanding with Reference to Contracts of Marriage," concerns the observation that a phrase that is attested in extant marriage contracts shows up also in the *tafsīr* literature.

Gerald Hawting and David Eisenberg's essay, "'Earnest Money' and the Sources of Islamic Law," surveys the early Muslim jurists' discussions of the *bay' al-arabūn* (a contract for paying "earnest money"), with an eye to comparable institutions in other cultures, and concludes that it was part of the general Near Eastern heritage of early Muslims.

Pavel Pavlovitch and David Powers' essay, "'A Bequest May Not Exceed One-Third': An *Isnād*-cum-*Matn* Analysis and Beyond," attempts to date a sub-cluster of a *ḥadīth* about the Prophet's response to Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ's desire to bequeath his property.

Christopher Melchert's essay, "Basra and Kufa as the Earliest Centers of Islamic Legal Controversy," compares Basran, Medinan, and Kufan legal positions using the data given by Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235).

Deborah Tor's essay, "God's Cleric: Al-Fuḍayl b. 'Iyād and the Transition from Caliphal to Prophetic Sunna," asserts that at the time of Hārūn (d. 193) there was a shift in the balance of power that transferred religious authority from caliphs to *hadīth* scholars. This explains why, unlike earlier *hadīth* scholars, al-Fuḍayl (d. 187) could reprimand the caliph with impunity.

Matthew Gordon's essay, "Al-Ḥmad ibn Tūlūn and the Politics of Deference," attempts to explain why Ibn Tūlūn (d. 270/884) did not act more ambitiously and boldly against the Abbasid dynasty in order to create a fully independent polity.

Kevin van Bladel's essay, "Eighth-Century Indian Astronomy in the Two Cities of Peace," postulates that the early Abbasid patronage of scientific learning – in this case, Sanskrit Astronomy – was in part indebted to intellectual currents from as far away as Tang China, where Indian Astronomy was held in high regard.

Maria Mavroudi's essay, "Greek Language and Education Under Early Islam," sets out to explain the availability of Greek-language education under Islamic rule. The topic sheds light on a number of related issues, among them the impact that the rise of Islam had on Greek education in the Near East and the Greco-Arabic translation movement patronized by the early Abbasids.

Fritz Zimmermann's essay, "*Kalām* and the Greeks," explores the Greek background to a popular style of disputation in early Islamic *kalām*, whereby an opponent is gradually led via a series of forked dilemmas to a contradiction or absurdity. Zimmermann argues that the technique principally derives

from the intense doctrinal debates that beset Eastern Christianity in the Late Antique period.

Michael Cooperson's essay, "‘Arabs’ and ‘Iranians’: The Uses of Ethnicity in the Early Abbasid Period," discusses how the concepts surrounding Arab ethnic identity could be complicated, stretched to their limits, or subverted when non-Arabs came to acquire the supposed attributes of Arabs.

Margaret Larkin's essay, "The Poetics of Cultural Identity: Al-Mutanabbi among the Büyids," is another essay about the interactions of ethnic boundaries. It discusses how the highly innovative poetry that al-Mutanabbi (d. 354/965) wrote in the Büyid court reflected Arab–Persian differences.

Khaled El-Rouayheb's essay, "Must God Tell Us the Truth? A Problem in Ash'arī Theology," deals with the question in *kalām* of how to establish that God does not lie. The Ash'arīs faced a dilemma: unlike the "*Hadith* folk," they sought to prove God's attributes rationally; yet, in doing so, unlike the Mu'tazilis, they could not make use of a notion of right and wrong existing independently of God's decrees. The essay shows how they nonetheless argued for God's honesty.

Chris Wickham's essay, "Administrators' Time: The Social Memory of the Early Medieval State, East and West," examines what administrators chose to remember in the empires of Byzantium, Islam, and China. Muslim administrators, unlike those in Byzantium and China, paid very little attention to military matters, suggesting that there was a substantial separation between the army and the bureaucracy in the medieval Islamic world.

Devin Stewart's essay, "An Eleventh-Century Justification of the Authority of Twelver Shiite Jurists," translates and explicates a text in which al-Karājikī (d. 449/1057), a student of al-Mufid, justified the authority of Shi'i jurists.

David Wasserstein's essay, "A Family Story: Ambiguities of Jewish Identity in Medieval Islam," zeroes in on a single family in al-Andalus to draw wide-ranging conclusions about the complexities of Jewish identity under Muslim rule, while contrasting the cultural fate of Jews living under Islam with that of Christians in Muslim territories.

David Abulafia's essay, "What Happened in al-Andalus: Minorities in al-Andalus and in Christian Spain," also considers the complex issues of identity, race, and religion in the Iberian Peninsula, and demonstrates how these issues have generated some of the larger questions of Iberian historiography.

Adam Silverstein's essay, "The Samaritan Version of the Esther Story," draws attention to a little-known, fourteenth-century Arabic version of the Biblical story of Esther, written by and for the Samaritan community. Silverstein explains why this version of the story was composed and attempts to identify some of the non-Samaritan sources that shaped its contours and contents.

Bella Tendler Krieger's essay, "New Evidence for the Survival of Sexually Libertine Rites among some Nuṣayrī-'Alawīs of the Nineteenth Century," discusses a Nuṣayrī manuscript written in Hama in 1306/1889. It shows that practices such as wife sharing and the orgiastic night may have been recognized by some members of the community and therefore were not merely figments of polemicists' imaginations.

Chase Robinson's essay, "Crone and the End of Orientalism," offers high praise for Patricia Crone with the statement that she fundamentally changed the field of Middle Eastern Studies.

Judith Herrin's essay, "Patricia Crone: A Brief Memoir," covers over four decades of friendship and professional collaboration with Patricia Crone, offering a behind-the-scenes view of Crone's career as it unfolded in London, Oxford, Cambridge, and Princeton.

Behnam Sadeghi

Asad Q. Ahmed

Robert Hoyland

Adam Silverstein

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Patricia Crone: A Brief Memoir

Judith Herrin

In Patricia Crone's grand study that runs the entire depth of her house in Princeton, and looks out on her lovely garden, lies a very striking Persian carpet, most gloriously woven in red with white patterns on it. Her father had it in his office and I always imagined it had been a tribute to her brilliance. But no, he thought that all of his four daughters should be fluent in at least two international languages and insisted on them going to finishing school in France and England. So after taking the "forprøve," or preliminary exam, at Copenhagen University, Patricia had to go to Paris to learn French and then to London, where she determined to get into a university as a pleasant and productive way of becoming fluent in English. She was accepted as an occasional student at King's College, London, and followed a course in medieval European history, especially church-state relations. And when she discovered SOAS, where they offered exactly the kind of course she wanted and could not do in Denmark (History branch IV), she wrote to her father and asked him if he would pay for three more years in London. His generous agreement thus sponsored her association with Islamic history. At SOAS, she learned Arabic, later adding Persian and Syriac, and got a First, which pleased her father, whom she describes as an "academic manqué." She then went on to write her PhD on the *mawālī* in the Umayyad period under the supervision of Bernard Lewis, although he left for America before the thesis was examined in 1974. Then she was awarded a Senior Research Fellowship at the Warburg Institute. And that is where we first met in the autumn of 1976.

Patricia had already spent two years at the Warburg and was well established in a nice office on the third floor looking out over Gordon Square. As this was her final year as Senior Research Fellow, she was looking for a more permanent university position. The director, Joe Trapp, had very kindly offered me a small stipend to organize a couple of interdisciplinary seminars and arranged for a second desk and chair to be installed in her office. When I knocked on the door and went in to take possession of my designated space, we became acquainted. I was immediately struck by her very bright blue eyes and quizzical expression. As I later learned, they were the outward signs of an extremely astute intelligence, a highly skeptical approach to problems and a passionate commitment to her research.

Patricia was a heavy smoker, and I was not. At the time, the Warburg allowed smoking even in the Reading Room, though not in the stacks, a striking feature

of the ubiquity of the habit. I found this unpleasant and Patricia gallantly agreed to smoke out of the window, which made the room very cold in the winter. But by then we had discovered that there was more that united than divided us and this great compensation for the disagreement over cigarettes was confirmed when Patricia agreed to contribute to the first seminar I organized, which was devoted to Iconoclasm (her paper on Islam, Judaeo-Christianity, and Byzantine Iconoclasm, 1980, is reprinted in her Variorum volume, Aldershot 2005). She took some persuading but the result was a fascinating exploration of the forces and borders between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity that made the Near East such a trembling cauldron of potent explosion between the seventh and the ninth centuries.

She and Michael Cook had already finished their joint study, *Hagarism*, which was due to be published in the spring of 1977. Michael expressed considerable anxiety about its appearance, realizing that it would ruffle more than a few feathers, especially Muslim ones. This was inevitable because the whole purpose of the book was to look beyond the Islamic tradition for contemporary accounts of the Prophet preserved in other languages. They had carefully examined all the records they could find in Greek, Syriac, Armenian, Persian, Aramaic, and Coptic for evidence of the movement that forged the Arab tribes into such a mighty military force. Of course, many dismissed Muhammad as just another infidel prophet, but others, especially Babylonian Judaism, presented indisputably useful contemporary evidence. While the first section of the book challenged the average reader with detailed analysis of some rather obscure texts, the second put together an account of the Near Eastern provinces before the rise of Islam, while the third offered an exciting new synthesis of all these observations, presenting the idea of Hagarism as a dominant force in the mixed world of the Prophet. On the eve of the book's publication, Michael took their names off the bell at the door to their flat on Marylebone High Street, but there were no incidents – reviews ranged from the highly appreciative to the extremely negative, and beyond. “Crone and Cook” was to become a term for unacceptable “revisionism,” but also, to those who appreciated the result, a touchstone for the wider explanation of the rise of Islam.

By the summer of 1977, as these notices began to arrive, Anthony Barnett and I had had our first child, who was rapidly introduced to the Warburg. Patricia enjoyed putting up the notice that read, “Quiet please, baby sleeping,” outside our office. Tamara soon became too active to be put to sleep on a cushion, but it was typical of Patricia’s generosity that she encouraged me to bring her in, leave her and rush around the stacks checking footnotes. She even offered to look after the 18-month-old when I was invited to give a paper to a Middle Eastern History group in Edinburgh, interested in the role of medieval women.

When I protested that I couldn't go, she simply told me to deliver Tamara to her flat for the day with all the necessary equipment. It was cold that November and Patricia got completely exhausted continuously pushing Tamara. She had discovered that the moment she stopped, Tamara started wailing, and as motion in the pushchair seemed the only way to stop the noise, Patricia carried on walking around, up and down the pavements of central London until I got back! And that paper was the first of many efforts to present the power and unusual authority of Byzantine women to a mixed audience, which became a major preoccupation of my later scholarship.

In 1977, Patricia took up an appointment at Oxford University and was rewriting the first part of her thesis as the book entitled *Slaves on Horses*. Her exploration of the evolution of the Islamic polity followed on from *Hagarism* with a sophisticated analysis of the role of tribes and tribal culture in early Islam, which she compared with Turkish tribes in the conquest of Central Asia. The two conquests by tribal peoples on horseback form the starting point and cross-fertilize the argument. At first she commuted from London to the Oriental Institute in Oxford, and we continued to see each other, but later she moved to Cambridge and began work on *Roman, Provincial and Islamic law*, based on the second part of her thesis, exploring the interconnected features of Near Eastern legal systems – Roman, Jewish, Islamic – as well as the promotion of slaves to positions of high authority that set Islamic society apart from traditional late antique and medieval societies. This was followed by *Meccan Trade*, which had a rather different perspective in settling the issue of Muhammad's rather humble mercantile activity that influenced the early years of Islam. She argued that the spice trade was an Orientalist invention and that the trade depicted in the Muslim sources could not account for the supposed wealth and power of Quraysh. It has proved equally definitive.

These three immensely erudite studies of the role of slaves, law, and trade in early Islam are supported by many pages of references and appendices, more footnotes than text, and are rooted in comparative analysis. They do not lack lighter moments. Patricia's example of how Islamic lawyers tackled the Roman legal dilemma of what happens when a slave girl, who has been promised her freedom if she gives birth to a son, has twins, forms an appendix that makes you laugh out loud.

While still teaching in Oxford, she and Martin Hinds began working together on the earliest conception of religious authority in Islam, which became *God's Caliph*. It was a great pleasure to visit them during his visits to Oxford, to see how happy she was, and this made his premature death all the more difficult to bear. She also kept in touch with us as our family expanded and we have photos of Patricia with our younger daughter Portia.

From 1985 onwards, I was often in Princeton so we kept in touch by letters, the exchange of offprints and Christmas cards – hers often displayed her puppets during a performance. In these Patricia revealed a talent for making and costuming puppets, which she then controlled to create a performance in the theatre also constructed for the purpose. She invited local children to make up the audience and gave extraordinary pleasure – another unexpected achievement. She also gave extravagant New Year's Eve parties, which always involved elaborate decorations with streamers, colored baskets of gifts, and much delicious food and drink. I think it was one of the Danish customs she imported with her.

In Cambridge her house was conveniently close to the station so that she could make a quick dash to London or the airport, and within easy bicycling of Gonville and Caius, the Faculty of Oriental Studies and the University library. Patricia always arranged her life to maximize the time she could spend at work – her efficiency in this respect is clear from the number of books and articles that resulted. She has an utterly single-minded manner in the way she pursues intellectual problems.

Her research takes off from a very close reading of the sources, questioning their reliability, credibility, and purpose with a general distrust of the common interpretation and received wisdom. She constantly challenges opinions expressed by both medieval and modern experts with a profound skepticism that characterizes her work. Along with this commitment to her chosen field went a determination to make it understandable to those who wanted to know, an example I found inspiring.

This concern with making Islam comprehensible is evident from her contributions to more contemporary issues. When Anthony suggested that she should write something about Muhammad for *openDemocracy*, she produced two very widely read articles: "What do we actually know about Mohammed?" has had 96,000 readers, and "Jihad, Idea and History," 26,000. This direct engagement with problems of today in an unprejudiced fashion balances Patricia's dedicated research into the much earlier history of Islam. To both spheres she brings a deep sense of involvement based on fearless honesty and very good judgment.

Similarly, when approached by Novin Doostdar of Oneworld Press for a book she did not want to write, she persuaded him to undertake a series of small biographies of Muslim figures modeled on the Oxford Past Masters and the modern equivalent. Together they planned what has become a most successful and informative range of short introductory volumes to key players in the Muslim world, from late antiquity to the present day, which provide a perfect entry point to periods of Islamic history when individual rulers, generals,

religious leaders, poets, and philosophers helped to create new conditions. Figures as different as Caliph Abd al-Malik, Mehmed Ali, Nazira Zeineddine, Abu Nuwas, and Chinggis Khan come to life in brief biographies commissioned, edited, and occasionally rewritten by Patricia. Thirty volumes in her series, *Makers of the Muslim World*, are already available and two more will be published this autumn.

As she realized how difficult it was for students of the late twentieth century to grasp the restrictions of the pre-industrial world, she began to introduce her lectures on Islamic history with one on the main features of pre-industrial societies. John Davey, an editor with Blackwells, suggested that she expand this into a book without footnotes designed for the general reader, something of a departure from her previous work. In *Pre-Industrial Societies* she emphasized a broad comparative approach to clarify the gap that separates us moderns from the non-industrialized world, and the huge differences wrought by the Industrial Revolution. Evidence from the Far East (China, Japan), the Indian subcontinent, and Islamic societies of the Near East and North Africa, was employed to highlight the specific character of such communities prior to industrialization, drawing parallels between imperial structures (of the Byzantine, Chinese, Japanese, and the Muslim Caliphate), and the looser, less organized, small units that dominated Northern Europe. In an imaginary island setting, she sets out the options for people who suddenly find themselves without a government and traces how they might react. Above all, she elucidates the underlying significance embedded in systems of land tenure, the role of cities and, most important, of religion in such pre-modern societies, whether Muslim, Hindu, Zoroastrian, or Christian.

Her delight in identifying structural inversions is captured in vivid terms, as seen for example in *Pre-Industrial Societies*, where she writes: "there was nothing shameful about patronage as such: it benefitted employed and employee alike. Wherever trust mattered as much as or more than skills, nepotism was a virtue, not a sign of corruption" (p. 33). And after exploring these features across a very wide spectrum of such societies Patricia then looked at the particularly distinctive nature of Europe, "First or freak?" and the concept of modernity. She asks what constitutes the modern and her reply encapsulates a great deal of thought: how to present Marxism, totalitarianism, and democracy in a commanding survey of what industrialization brought in its wake. And what a basic shift this involved: "ideologically we are all identical, however different we may seem, not, as in pre-industrial societies, different regardless of our fundamental similarities" (p. 194). It is a book whose depth of insight grows with re-rereading.

Much to my regret, in 1995, when I returned to England to take up the Chair of Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at King's College, London, Patricia was already being courted by the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. So we swapped continents and remained on opposite sides of the Atlantic. Before she left, however, Patricia gave one of her most extravagant parties, taking over the Hall of Gonville and Caius College for a feast, a real feast, preceded by champagne on the lawn. Anthony helped light fireworks to mark the event. Every table was packed with friends and colleagues, who had been carefully placed to provoke interesting conversations, and after the great dinner college staff cleared away the long tables and benches so that we could dance to her favorite Strauss waltzes and polkas. This is so much harder to do than you imagine – we needed more rock and roll as well – but everyone enjoyed celebrating her and wishing her all the best for her move to the States.

Fortunately, it didn't mean that we saw each other less, as we made more effort to keep in touch. After discovering that we shared a passion for opera, we planned our visits to Glyndebourne and London operas to be sure that we could go together, and in this way enjoyed several memorable performances and splendid picnics every summer. I also return to America frequently and take every opportunity to visit her in Princeton, in the elegant double house she converted on Humbert Street. Typical of Patricia, she decided against living in the grand accommodation provided by the Institute down Olden Lane and purchased this plot in central Princeton, which was near the shops and the University library. As usual, she ensured that she could cycle to work.

Ensconced at the Institute, Patricia devoted herself to further detailed studies of Islamic government, the Muslim dynasties, the nativist prophets, and pagan opponents of the Prophet – and yet more work in progress. All this is only achieved by maintaining a rigorous working schedule, never relaxing her concentration until the evening, passed as often as not watching old films and favorite BBC series. Yet hers has never been an ascetic existence. An extraordinarily welcoming manner and generous hospitality means any number of parties for students and colleagues, delicious dinners, and a range of Californian red wines to accompany her excellent cooking. She has always traveled most adventurously – all over the Near East, further afield to Vietnam, and more recently to Uzbekistan. For my part, I only persuaded her to travel from London to Lewes, though once we went as far as Aberystwyth for a seminar on comparative medieval social structures (we thoroughly enjoyed the single track railway through the Welsh hills and the sea front on the coast). But I can confirm what a cheerful traveling companion she is and what an enormous pleasure it is to count her as the best of friends.

Patricia has an extraordinary capacity to adapt to change and appears equally at home in London, Princeton, and surely in Denmark at family reunions with her siblings. Yet she is very rooted, taking immense care over the planting of her garden (and her neighbors'), and joyfully celebrating their flowering. Her devotion to the roses which bloom so briefly in Princeton blocks any effort to lure her away at that time. She is also unusually responsive to changes in other parts of the world today, foreseeing with great distress and her acerbic tongue the agonizing conflicts across the Middle East today.

Any lasting solution to these deep social clefts will need to respect and understand their history. The rise of Islam brought to an end what is now called Late Antiquity and precipitated the formation of Eastern and Western Christendom in what remained of the Roman Empire north of the Arab conquests. This makes Islam the most recent historically of all the world's great monotheistic religions. Perhaps for this reason, its insistence on being the only vehicle of the true prophet is amongst the most vehement, and its claims are the most vulnerable to research. The historian of the extraordinary rise of Islam, therefore, has to be especially scrupulous, exacting and meticulous, both in order to be sensitive and if possible unimpeachable in her reconstruction of what happened, as well as to glimpse the previously existing context through the all-encompassing stamp of the conquests. It is Patricia's accomplishment to have achieved this. Acutely conscious of the human realities (of all kinds), she remains utterly intransigent in her own approach as a secular historian *par excellence*. What makes it doubly awesome is that she carried this through both for what became the Arab world and for the pre-Islamic history of Persia, to which she dedicated her most recent years resulting in yet another *magnum opus*, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, which has now garnered four prestigious prizes, including the Albert Hourani book award, the Houshang Pourshariati Iranian Studies book award, the Central Eurasian Studies Society award, and the James Henry Breasted Prize of the American Historical Society for the best book in English in any field of history prior to 1000 CE. Together with her major works on *Medieval Islamic Political Theory* and *God's Rule*, she has transformed our understanding of this critical period of history that is so relevant today.

Tabula Gratulatoria

Carol Bakhos

To my teacher, friend and confidant: I will always cherish our afternoon sessions, as you poured us drinks and together we pored over *tafsīr*. I broke a few teeth on the *isnāds*, and we broke into laughter. I admire your insatiable curiosity, tenacity, patience, and penetrating insights, and am grateful for your love.

Michael Cooperson

I have not had the good fortune to be Professor Crone's student or colleague – at least, not in the strict sense of those terms.¹ Like many scholars of my generation, however, I feel that I have studied with her, even if she did not know it. One of my now very distinguished friends once said that he taught himself to be a historian by reading her work. Though I am not a historian, I have also been inspired: I have learned from her that rethinking all of one's assumptions is tremendously exciting.

When I first met Patricia in person at the first School of Abbasid Studies conference in 2002, I was not disappointed: her combination of scholarly rigor and personal warmth was impossible to resist. Soon thereafter, I had the privilege of writing a short book on the caliph al-Ma'mūn under her editorship. Of her many comments, my favorite was one I remember as reading: "This is all wrong! Do it again." She was right, and I did.

Over the past few years, Patricia has done us the honor of visiting UCLA on several occasions. After one of her seminars, one of my then-graduate students remarked, "I want to be just like her," a sentiment that places her in the company of a great many of her elders. I am therefore delighted to be able to offer our teacher the following modest tribute.

Farhad Daftary

I first met Patricia Crone in the early 1990s, when she was still a lecturer at Oxford. Subsequently, once she had already moved to Caius College, Cambridge, Patricia began to teach "energetically" a course on early Islam in the then-newly designed Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies launched in 1994 by The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, under my management. Patricia's original contributions to the study of the formative period of Islam, with its complex issues, have been truly outstanding; not only has she discovered new

¹ I am very grateful to Behnam Sadeghi for his generous invitation to contribute to this volume.

primary sources, but she has also offered new interpretations of the known sources. I am deeply honored to have been included in the circle of Patricia Crone's colleagues and friends.

Shmuel Moreh

I congratulate my friend of 40 years, Patricia Crone. She is an outstanding scholar, one who would not publish an article or book without contributing a significant idea or approach. Her unquenchable thirst for knowledge and her vast learning, creativity, and meticulousness have made her one of the most important scholars of our time in the field of Islamic Studies. Last not least, she is always ready to help other scholars in their research. I feel honored to have known her and to have collaborated with her.

Everett Rowson

I have always found Patricia Crone formidable. Before I met her in 1995, she was formidable and a bit scary; after I met her (having called her up, out of the blue, when I was in Cambridge, and received an amazingly warm response), scary got replaced by charming and gracious. Our collegial interchanges during my year at the Institute for Advanced Study were the best and most rewarding part of that experience. We do not see eye-to-eye on everything (no one sees eye-to-eye with Patricia on everything), but I admire her take-no-prisoners critical mind, and especially her willingness to back off and start all over again when the evidence so dictates. That her impact on the field of Islamic Studies has been massive, and massively invigorating, goes without saying. On this occasion I offer her my deepest respect and affection.

Samer Traboulsi

The works of great scholars speak to their achievements and contributions to their fields of study. Patricia Crone has made contributions rarely encompassed by one individual scholar in a multitude of fields spanning geographic, temporal, and linguistic landscapes. However, Patricia's exceptional published output is only part of her immeasurable contributions. Her wholehearted support and assistance of her students and colleagues, some of whom she has not even met in person, by advising their dissertations, reading their manuscripts, discussing their work, and sharing their interests in topics outside of her current focus have undoubtedly left their mark on the field. Even those who differed with her academically cannot but admit that Patricia's critical methodology has led them to rethink and reconsider their scholarly conclusions and propositions. Instead of isolating herself in the scholarly refuge of the Institute of Advanced

Study and producing even more groundbreaking scholarship, Patricia chose to share her precious time and valuable resources with serious scholars and students without expecting much in return. It is rare to encounter a scholar of this caliber and compassion these days. I did, and I am proud of it and cherish every moment I spent in the esteemed company of Patricia Crone.

Curriculum Vitae of Patricia Crone

University Training

Copenhagen (History), 1963–65.

London, King's College (History), 1965–66.

London, School of Oriental and African Studies, BA Honours (History, branch IV), 1969 (First Class); PhD 1974.

Employment

University of London, Warburg Institute: Senior Research Fellow, 1974–77.

University of Oxford: University Lecturer in Islamic History and Fellow of Jesus College, 1977–90.

University of Cambridge: Assistant University Lecturer in Islamic Studies and Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, 1990–92; University Lecturer in Islamic Studies, 1992–94; University Reader in Islamic History, 1994–7.

Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton: Mellon Professor of Islamic History in the School of Historical Studies, 1997–.

Publications

1 Books

Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. (With Michael Cook). Arabic translation, Damascus, 2003.

Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. (With Martin Hinds).

Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987. (Reprinted 2004. Arabic translation, Cairo, 2005.)

Pre-Industrial Societies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. (Swedish translation, Lund, 1991. German translation, Munich, 1992. Second edition, Oxford, 2003.)

The Book of Strangers: Medieval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. (Danish translation, Copenhagen, 2004.)

The Epistle of Salim b. Dhakwan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. (With Fritz Zimmermann).

Medieval Islamic Political Thought. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. (Published in America under the title *God's Rule: Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. New York, 2004). Paperback 2005. Winner of the British-Kuwait Friendship Prize 2005. Turkish translation, Istanbul, 2007. Persian translation, Tehran, 2011 (ch. 13 reprinted as an article in the periodical *Bukhara*, Spring 2011). Arabic translation in progress.

From Kavād to al-Ghazālī: Religion, Law and Political Thought in the Near East, c. 600–1100. Ashgate, 2005. (Variorum reprint of 12 articles.)

From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire: Army, State and Society in the Near East c. 600–850. Ashgate, 2008. (Variorum reprint of 12 articles.)

The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

2 Articles

“Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm.” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* ii (1980): 59–95 (= *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī* (Variorum), Ashgate, 2005, no. III).

“Jāhilī and Jewish Law: The Qasama.” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* iv (1984): 153–201 (= *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī* (Variorum), Ashgate, 2005, no. IV).

“The Tribe and the State.” In *States in History*, edited by J. A. Hall, 48–77. Oxford, 1986 (= *From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2008, no. I).

“Max Weber, das islamische Recht und die Entstehung des Kapitalismus.” In *Max Weber's Sicht des Islams*, edited by W. Schluchter, 294–333. Frankfurt am Main. (Revised English version, “Weber, Islamic Law, and the Rise of Capitalism.” In *Weber and Islam*, edited by T. E. Huff and W. Schluchter, 247–72. New Brunswick, 1999.) (= *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2005, no. VI.)

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“Kavād’s Heresy and Mazdak’s Revolt.” *Iran*, xxix (1991): 21–42 (= *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2005, no. XII).

“Serjeant and Meccan Trade.” *Arabica* xxix (1992): 216–40.

“Tribes and States in the Middle East.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3 (1993): 353–76 (Review article) (= *From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2008, no. II).

“‘Even an Ethiopian Slave’: The Transformation of a Sunni Tradition.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* lvii (1994): 59–67.

“Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad Period Political Parties?” *Der Islam* Lxxi (1994): 1–57 (= *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī*, (Variorum), Aldershot, 2005, no. VIII).

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“The First-Century Concept of Hiğra.” *Arabica* xli (1994): 352–87 (= *From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2008, no. III).

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“The Rise of Islam in the World.” In *Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, edited by F. Robinson, 2–31. Cambridge, 1996.

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“The ‘Abbasid Abnā’ and Sasanid Cavalrymen.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8 (1998): 1–19 (= *From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2008, no. VIII).

“A Statement by the Najdiyya Khārijites on the Necessity of the Imamate.” *Studia Islamica*, 88 (1998): 55–76 (= *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2005, no. IX).

“The Early Islamic World.” In *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, edited by K. Raflaub and N. Rosenstein, 309–32. Cambridge, MA, 1999.

“The Significance of Wooden Weapons in the Revolt of al-Mukhtār and the Abbasid Revolution.” In *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, i,

174–85. Leiden, 2000 (= *From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2008, no. VI).

“Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists.” *Past and Present* 167 (2000): 3–28 (= *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2005, no. x).

“The Khārijites and the Caliphal Title.” In *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions in Memory of Norman Calder*, 85–91. Oxford, 2000 (= *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2005, no. xi).

“Shūrā as an Elective Institution.” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 19 (2001): 3–39 (= *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2005, no. vii).

“A New Source on Ismailism at the Samanid Court.” (With Luke Treadwell.) In *Texts, Documents and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D. S. Richards*, edited by C. F. Robinson, 37–67. Leiden and Boston, 2003.

“What was al-Fārābī’s Imamic Constitution?” *Arabica* 50 (2003): 306–21.

“The Pay of Client Soldiers.” *Der Islam* 80 (2003): 284–300 (= *From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2008, no. x).

“Al-Fārābī’s Imperfect Constitutions.” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 57 (2004): 191–228.

“Mawālī and the Prophet’s Family: An Early Shī‘ite View.” In *Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam*, edited by M. Bernards and J. Nawas, 167–94. Leiden, 2005 (= *From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2008, no. xi).

“How did the Quranic Pagans Make a Living?” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 68 (2005): 387–99. (Danish translation in *Tidskrift for Dansk Islamsforskning* 1, 2006.)

“Post-Colonialism in Tenth-Century Islam” *Der Islam* 83 (2006): 2–38.

“Imperial Trauma: The Case of the Arabs.” *Common Knowledge* 12 (2006): 107–16 (= *From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire* (Variorum), Aldershot, 2008, no. xii).

“Abū Sa‘īd al-Ḥadīrī and Theodicy.” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31 (2006): 92–106.

“Quraysh and the Roman Army: Making Sense of the Meccan Leather Trade.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70 (2007): 63–88.

“‘Barefoot and Naked’: What did the Bedouin of the Arab Conquests Look Like?” *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): 1–11.

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“Abū Tammām on the Mubayyiḍa.” In *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*, edited by Omar Ali-de Unzaga, 167–88. London, 2011.

“Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God.” In *Revelation, Literature, and Society in Late Antiquity*, edited by P. Townsend and M. Vidas, 315–36. (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism.) Tübingen, 2011.

“Al-Jāḥīẓ on *aṣḥāb al-jahālāt* and the Jahmiyya.” In *Medieval Arabic Thought: Essays in Honour of Fritz Zimmermann*, edited by R. Hansberger, M. Afifi al-Akiti, and C. Burnett, 27–40. London and Turin.

“The Qur’anic *mushrikūn* and the Resurrection, Part I.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75/3 (2012): 445–72; Part II, ibid. (2013): 1–20.

“The Dahrīs According to al-Jāḥīẓ.” *Mélanges de l’Université de St Joseph* 63 (2010–11): 63–82. (In fact published fall, 2012.)

“Buddhism as Ancient Iranian Paganism.” In *Late Antiquity: Eastern Perspectives*, edited by T. Bernheimer and A. Silverstein, 25–41. Exeter, 2012.

3 Encyclopaedia Entries

A Companion to Samaritan Studies, ed. A. D. Crown, R. Pummer, and A. Tal, Tübingen, 1993: “Athinganoi.”

Encyclopaedia Iranica: “Khorramdīniyya” (article-sized).

Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition: “Khālid b. al-Walīd,” “khiṭṭa,” “Masāmi‘a,” “ma‘ūna,” “mawlā” (article-sized), “Muḥallab,” “Muḥallabids,” “Sulaymān b. Kathīr,” “Uthmāniyya” (article-sized), “Yazīd b. Abī Muslim.”

Encyclopaedia of Islam, 3rd edition: “anarchism,” “arīf,” “atheism,” “Bābak,” “Barāhima,” “Daysanites.”

Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an: “War” (article-sized).

Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought: “Clients,” “philosophy,” “Quraysh,” “sunna,” and core article “traditional political thought” (article-sized).

4 Other Writings

“Vom Studium vorindustrieller Gesellschaften.” *Börsenblatt* (1992): 78–80.

“The Rise of the Muslim Sects.” In *Chung-tung yen-chiu tao-lun*. Taipei, 1993. (In Chinese.)

“Islam and Messianic Politics.” *Zeitsprünge. Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit* 4 (2000).

"Til Paradis i laenker." *Kritik*. Copenhagen, May 2003.

"What do we actually know about Mohammed?" *Open Democracy*. August 31, 2006. (Online publication.)

"Jihad: Idea and History." *Open Democracy*. May 1, 2007. (Online publication.)

"Islam and Religious Freedom." Keynote speech at the Deutscher Orientalistentag, 2007. Published at: <http://orient.ruf.uni-freiburg.de/dotpub/crone.pdf>. Also published (without the beginning) at the *Open Democracy* website under the title "No Pressure Then: Freedom of Religion in Islam."

5 *Edited*

Martin Hinds, *Studies in Early Islamic History*, edited by J. Bacharach, L. I. Conrad, and P. Crone. Princeton, 1996.

The Greek Strand in Islamic Political Thought, edited by E. Gannagé, P. Crone, M. Aouad, D. Gutas, and E. Schütrumpf. Beirut, 2004 (= *MUSJ* 57).

Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought, edited by G. Bowering. Princeton, 2013. (In fact published fall, 2012.) Associate editor along with three others.

6 *In Press*

"The Book of Watchers in the Qur'ān." In *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism and Science in the Mediterranean*, edited by H. Ben-Shammai, S. Shaked, and S. Stroumsa, Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Paper presented in 2005. Text available at my IAS website: [IAS//people/faculty](http://ias/people/faculty) and [Emeriti/PatriciaCrone/publications](http://emeriti/patricia_crone/publications).

"Moqanna'" In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

"Pre-Existence in Iran: Zoroastrians, ex-Christian Mu'tazilites, and Jews on the Human Acquisition of Bodies." Forthcoming in *Aram*.

"Ungodly Cosmologies." Forthcoming in *Oxford Companion to Islamic Theology*, edited by S. Schmidtke.

7 *In Preparation*

"Empedocles' Oath and Zoroastrianism."

"Problems in Sura 53."

"Idrīs, Atrahasis and al-Khidr."

"Oral Transmission from the Islamic World to Europe: The Case of the Three Impostors."

"Jewish Christianity and the Qur'an."

"Arabs as Godfearers."

Conferences

Joint organizer of the Triennial Colloquium on Hadith, Oxford 1982, Cambridge 1985, and Oxford 1988.

Joint organizer of a conference on Pre-Modern Communism, Cambridge, April 1992. (With J. A. Hall.)

Organizer of conference on the Greek Strand in Islamic Political Thought, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, June 2003.

Organizer of the conference on the Late Antique Roots of the Qur'an, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, June 2004.

Organizer of the conference on Apologetics and Shu'ubiyya in Antiquity and Islam, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, May 2006. (With assistance from Glen Bowersock.)

Organizer of workshop on Materialist Thought c. 200–900, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, May 2007. (With assistance from Heinrich von Staden.)

Joint organizer of workshop on Islamic Freethinking and the Radical Enlightenment, Institute for Advanced Study, April 2008. (With Jonathan Israel and Martin Mulsow.)

Organizer of the Colloquium on the Qur'an, Institute for Advanced Study, June 1–3, 2009.

Organizer of series of workshops on the Transmission of Subversive Ideas from the Islamic World to Europe c. 1200–1650, Institute for Advanced Study, spring term 2010. (A continuation of the 2008 conference which focused on a later period and which was based on formal papers rather than texts distributed in advance.) The last gathering was planned for 2011, but had to be postponed to 2012, and then it had to be cancelled due to my illness.

Series and Projects

Editor, with J. A. Hall, of the series *Explorations in Social Structure*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, –1992.

Academic adviser to the series *Themes in Islamic History*, Cambridge University Press, 1997–.

Creator and editor of the series *Makers of the Muslim World*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2002–. (29 volumes published to date.)

Member of the editorial board of the “Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā” series, Ismaili Institute, London, 2003–.

Member of the Mu'tazilite Manuscripts Project, 2003–.

Member of the Editorial Board of *Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, Princeton, 2006–12.

Member of the international advisory board of the “Muslim History and Heritage” series for the publication of texts, Tehran and Berlin, 2011–.

Periodicals

Member of the editorial board of *Islamic Law and Society*, Leiden, –1996.

Former Member of the editorial advisory board of *The International History Review*.

Former Member of the editorial board of the series *Studies in Human Society*, published by E. J. Brill, Leiden.

Member of the editorial board of *Arabica*, Paris, 1995–.

Member of the editorial board of *Studia Islamica*, Paris, 1999–.

Member of the editorial board of *Social Evolution and History* (Moscow), 2001–.

Member of the editorial board of *History Compass*, Oxford, 2006–. (Online journal.)

Honorary

Member of the American Philosophical Society, 2001–.

Honorary Professor, Faculty of Theology, Aarhus University, 2007–.

Honorary Doctor, University of Copenhagen, November 2009.

Honorary Doctor, University of Leiden, February 2013.

Member of the British Academy, July 2013.

Honorary Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, UK, July 2013.

Levi della Vida medal, UCLA, October 2013.

List of Contributors

David Abulafia

is Professor of Mediterranean History at Cambridge University and a Fellow of the British Academy. His most recent book is *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Penguin).

Asad Q. Ahmed

is Associate Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Studies, the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of *The Religious Elite of the Early Islamic Ḥijāz* (University of Oxford, 2011) and *Avicenna's Deliverance: Logic* (Oxford University Press, 2011). He is also the co-editor of *The Islamic Scholarly Tradition* (Brill, 2010) and *The Ḥāshiya and Islamic Intellectual History* (special issue, *Oriens* 41:3–4).

Karen Bauer

is a Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies. She specializes in Islamic social and intellectual history, with a focus on the Qur’ān and its interpretation (*tafsīr*), and gender. She has edited and introduced a volume entitled *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qur’ānic Exegesis, 2nd/8th–9th/15th centuries* (Oxford University Press, 2013), and her monograph *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses* is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press. Her published articles include “Justifying the Genre: A Study of Introductions to Classical Works of *Tafsīr*” (2013); “Spiritual Hierarchy and Gender Hierarchy in Fātimid Ismā‘īlī Interpretations of the Qur’ān” (*Journal of Qur’ānic Studies*, 2012); and “Debates on Women’s Status as Judges and Witnesses in Post-Formative Islamic Law” (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 2010).

Kevin van Bladel

received his PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Yale University. He is an Associate Professor and Chair of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at Ohio State University.

Michael Cooperson

is Professor of Arabic at UCLA. He specializes in the cultural history of the early Abbasid period and also works on Maltese language and literature. His recent publications include a translation of Jurjī Zaydān’s historical novel *Al-Amīn wa-l-Ma’mūn* (*The Caliph’s Heirs*, 2012) and an edition-translation

of Ibn al-Jawzī's biography of Ibn Ḥanbal (*Virtues of the Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, 2013).

David M. Eisenberg

is a partner at an international law firm and teaches Islamic law as an adjunct member of the Law Faculty at Queen Mary University of London. He is a co-editor of *Islamic Finance: Law and Practice* (Oxford University Press).

Khaled El-Rouayheb

is Professor of Islamic Intellectual History at Harvard University. He works on Islamic intellectual history, especially Arabic-Islamic logic, philosophy, and theology in the period after the twelfth century.

Matthew S. Gordon

is a Professor of Islamic History at Miami University. He specializes in the social, political, and military history of the Abbasid period, with a particular interest in Egypt. He is the author of *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords* (2001) and *The Rise of Islam* (2005), and a co-editor and contributor of *The Ya'qūbī Translation Project*. He is presently completing a biography of Aḥmad ibn Tūlūn, the third/ninth century governor of Egypt.

Gerald Hawting

has been an Emeritus Professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, since 2009, where he was privileged to be a fellow student with Patricia Crone in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Most of his publications concern the emergence and early history of Islam.

Judith Herrin

is Professor Emerita of Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at King's College London and the author of *The Formation of Christendom and Byzantium, the Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*. She is currently working on a study of Ravenna and its role in European development.

Robert Hoyland

is Professor of the Late Antique and Early Islamic History of the Middle East at the Institute for Study of the Ancient World, New York University. He is the author of *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton, 1997), *Arabia and the Arabs* (London, 2001) and *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (New York, 2014).

Bella Tendler Krieger

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Variant Traditions, Relative Chronology, and the Study of Intra-Quranic Parallels

*Joseph Witztum*¹

1 Introduction

A comparison of two passages with identical subjects – even if they do not originate from entirely different periods – can occasionally suggest the likelihood that one originated earlier than the other. Since Muḥammad clearly often repeats himself, it is sometimes possible to distinguish the original from the later version.²

This paper treats parallel accounts in the Quran which use similar but not identical language to relate different versions of the same story. To use the language of Claus Schedl, I wish to examine the “synoptic problem” of the Quran.³

That the Quran contains many such repetitions and parallel passages is well known. Opinions, however, vary greatly as to how this fact should be interpreted and evaluated. To demonstrate the variety let us contrast two quotations. A folklorist remarks that:

1 It is a great pleasure to offer this essay to my dear teacher, Patricia Crone, to whom I owe so much. Parts of this essay were presented in the Berlin Seminar of EUME, in Angelika Neuwirth's Quran seminar, in the Jerusalem *From Jāhilīyya to Islam* conference and in my class at Hebrew University. I am grateful to the participants of these forums for their useful comments and challenging questions. I am also grateful to Menahem Kister for discussing several points with me. An earlier version of section 3.1 appeared in my dissertation. I am indebted to Michael Cook, Patricia Crone, Andras Hamori, Manolis Papoutsakis, and Aron Zysow for their comments on the dissertation. I am especially indebted to Patricia Crone (yet again) and Behnam Sadeghi for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. The writing of this essay was made possible by an Alexander von Humboldt fellowship.

2 Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 1:63; English translation slightly adapted from Behn (translator), *The History of the Qur'an*, 51.

3 Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus*, 416. Schedl's highly idiosyncratic logotechnical analysis of the Quran aside, he does at time make interesting observations. By using the formulation “synoptic problem,” I do not wish to imply that the degree of the problem in the Quran is in any way comparable to that of the Gospels or that the explanation is necessarily the same in both cases.

[A] modern editor, armed with the “Find” feature on his or her computer, would no doubt have eliminated such duplicate Qur'an passages as being unnecessarily repetitious. However, since the Qur'an is thought to be a sacred text consisting of Allah's own words, it would have been deemed sacrilegious to delete such duplicate passages.⁴

A famous Ash'arite theologian, on the other hand, states that “repeating a story in different words which convey the same meaning is a difficult matter in which eloquence manifests itself and good style becomes evident.”⁵

But eloquence or lack thereof is not the only question posed by the parallel accounts. They raise other issues of greater historical interest. Do the repeated narratives indicate that the Quran as we have it is not the product of one author? Might a careful study of parallel passages teach us something about the form in which the suras were composed (oral versus written)? Can they be utilized to establish a relative chronology between suras? What do they teach us about the coherence of suras? And finally, do they tell us anything about the ways in which the Quran adapted earlier traditions?

Scholars have approached these important questions in different ways and I will not resolve all these issues here. My goals are rather more modest. In what follows I will briefly survey some approaches to the problem of the parallel accounts and then examine two examples in detail. In doing so I wish to emphasize several points. First, a systematic study of parallel passages in the Quran is long overdue in order for us to answer basic questions concerning the formation of the Quran.⁶ Second, a comparison with pre-Islamic traditions at times allows us to follow the changes and transformations of specific motifs in the Quran.⁷ Third, scholars tend to emphasize one model or other of studying

⁴ Dundes, *Fables of the Ancients?*, 27.

⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 93. For other classical explanations for the repetition of stories in the Quran, see, for now, al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 2:800–3; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, 3:25–32 (*naw'* 46); and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 7:1654–8 (*naw'* 56).

⁶ Nöldeke noted the potential of parallel passages to indicate relative chronology (quoted at the beginning of this paper), but as Pohlmann rightfully notes, Nöldeke did not base his work on this method (Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 82, note 247). Nöldeke only mentions this briefly after discussing other criteria such as the Muslim tradition and the content and language of the suras. The method proposed by Nöldeke is applied in Beck, “Iblis und Mensch.” A more recent study which seeks to establish a chronological order by comparing parallel accounts is Ahmed, “Lot's Daughters.” For Pohlmann, see below.

⁷ Cf. Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, where the comparison with pre-Islamic traditions serves a somewhat different purpose. As a result of his comparison the author concludes that

parallel accounts, whereas it seems that a combination of several approaches is called for.

2 General Approaches

At times parallel passages are examined from theological or apologetic angles.⁸ Consider, for example, a short article written in Cairo in 1925 by the scholar and missionary Earl E. Elder. In it he examines parallel accounts of Moses in the Quran and concludes:

The Moslem who is disturbed by reading the accounts of the same event as recorded in the different gospels must remember that other books for which the claim is made that they are divine – even the Koran which he reveres – contain considerable matter that needs harmonizing. The basis for rejecting the authority or authenticity of a book is not to be the finding of variant readings or differences in parallel passages. The truth of a book claiming to be a revelation rests not in its outward form, but in its intrinsic values and effect.⁹

My essay, however, steers away from theology and is devoted to explanations of the phenomenon of parallel accounts and their emergence. Among the various scholarly approaches one finds a great variety of opinion. Whereas one scholar compares Muhammad to a composer who revisits a theme several times with variations,¹⁰ another scholar sees in the parallel accounts an indication that

some Quranic passages are the work of scholars of Jewish and Christian origin, writing after the death of the Prophet. See the summary in *ibid.*, 190–3.

⁸ An extremely apologetic tone is found in Kadhim, review of *Fables of the Ancients?* Here Alan Dundes is reproached for daring to treat the issue of parallel accounts and contradictions in the Quran as worthy of discussion. The following quotation is representative: “The talk about contradictions in the Qur'an has traditionally been a favourite topic for those wishing to denigrate Islam. It is therefore unfortunate that Professor Dundes chooses it as worthy of discussion . . .” (*ibid.*, 82).

⁹ Elder, “Parallel Passages,” 259.

¹⁰ Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus*, 416:

“Ein Komponist kann doch dasselbe Thema verschieden variieren. Die drei Zakarija-Erzählungen wären demnach drei Variationen zum selben Thema. Damit dürfte inner-koranisch das Problem gelöst sein. Gleichheit im Wortlaut sowie auch Verschiedenheit in der Gestaltung gehen auf das Konto des ‘Komponisten’ Muhammad zurück.”

several subsequent hands were at work in the production of the Quran, a process which continued after the death of the Prophet.¹¹

In this section I would like to briefly and somewhat schematically describe a few approaches or models to the problem of the parallel accounts. Approaches to the Quran generally can be plotted on a grid consisting of several axes concerning some related yet independent basic textual assumptions, which often are not stated explicitly. Especially important for our topic are the following axes: synchronic–diachronic; atomistic–coherent; oral–written; single author–multiple authors; harmony–discord; human–divine. Unfortunately, the history and methods of Quranic studies remain under-studied, as does the text itself.¹²

This essay, however, will not attempt to give a full analysis of scholarly approaches to the Quran. Focusing on views that are pertinent to our topic, I will discuss theories of variant traditions; harmonistic interpretations; views emphasizing the oral composition of the text; contextual readings; and diachronic methods of analyzing the Quran.

2.1 *Independent Variant Traditions: Wansbrough*

A radical position is presented by John Wansbrough, who sees in these parallel accounts variant traditions. These indicate “the existence of independent, possibly regional, traditions incorporated more or less intact into the canonical compilation, itself the product of expansion and strife within the Muslim community.”¹³ The inspiration of Biblical criticism is evident.¹⁴ Although Wansbrough did not elaborate his approach, the seven pages he devoted to this issue have the merit of having drawn the attention of Western scholarship to the problem of the parallel accounts.¹⁵ One striking weakness of Wansbrough’s

¹¹ Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, throughout. Cf. Sadeghi, “The Chronology of the Qur’ān,” 288, where it is argued that an examination of formal stylistic patterns suggests that the Quran had one author. After adducing his argument, which is based on stylistic continuity, Sadeghi adds: “the present study makes palpable what we knew already: no competent and seasoned scholar of the Qur’ān, while aware of the stylistic variation in the text, could lose sight of its underlying unity.” Whether or not Sadeghi’s argument precludes the possibility of specific passages originating from different authors in the same cultural environment remains unclear to me.

¹² Cf. works such as Nahkola, *Double Narratives in the Old Testament*.

¹³ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 21.

¹⁴ For the role that duplicated narratives played in the development of Old Testament criticism, see Nahkola, *Double Narratives in the Old Testament*.

¹⁵ See Cook, *The Koran*, 141–2. Cook treats the issue of parallel passages briefly. After comparing two versions of the Thamūd story, he remarks:

approach is that he does not satisfactorily explain the undeniable relationship between the parallel accounts, a relationship which he himself recognized.¹⁶ Another question that requires an explanation is why the variants are preserved in the Quran. Is this the result of conservative editing or merely oversight?¹⁷

2.2 *Harmonistic Readings*

The mirror image of Wansbrough's model is found in the traditional Islamic approach, which tends to read such parallel accounts harmonistically. The idea

"Clearly the divergence between the two passages was generated by an agency for which the material possessed a degree of plasticity of a quite different order from anything we see in the textual variants attested by the oldest manuscripts or transmitted by the Muslim scholars. Here, then, we have a window onto a time when Koranic material – here on earth at least – was in a state of considerable flux. (*Ibid.*, 136.)."

¹⁶ Note his following comment: "Such elaboration is characteristic of Muslim scripture, in which a comparatively small number of themes is preserved in varying stages of literary achievement" (Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 25). See also his later remark:

"I have in the preceding pages attempted to show that the structure itself of Muslim scripture lends little support to the theory of a deliberate edition. Particularly in the *exempla* of salvation history, characterized by variant traditions, but also in passages of exclusively paraenetic or eschatological content, ellipsis and repetition are such as to suggest not the carefully executed project of one or of many men, but rather the product of an organic development from originally independent traditions during a long period of transmission. That such traditions might have been of local/regional character is not impossible, but in view of the inconclusive nature of the so-called 'metropolitan codices' regional distribution of the variant traditions could hardly be justified. An alternative and less refractory hypothesis is one already advanced: juxtaposition of independent pericopes to some extent unified by means of a limited number of rhetorical conventions. Such might be held to account both for the repetitive character of the document and for what is undeniably its stylistic homogeneity, the latter quality in part a consequence of the former. (*Ibid.*, 46–7.)"

Wansbrough's thoughts on this question have recently been discussed in Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 33–5. Cf. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 61–8, where the formulaic character of Quranic phraseology is studied and the "unmistakably homogeneous composition" of the Quran is noted. I am indebted to Behnam Sadeghi for this last reference.

¹⁷ Another model which should be examined is that of variant traditions reflecting a shared source. See, for instance, the case of the parallel psalms (Psalms 14 and 53, 31.2–4 and 71.1–3; 40.15–18 and 70, 57.8–12 and 108.2–6, 60.7–14 and 108.7–14). The differences between the parallel psalms reflect both problems of textual transmission and endeavors of independent literary creation; see Rofé, *Introduction*, 437–40.

is that the true story is to be found by combining the various Quranic reports.¹⁸ Though the harmonistic approach is at times convincing, in itself it is insufficient. It cannot easily explain blatant contradictions between parallel versions and does not explain why the Quran chooses to present a given story slightly differently each time.

The harmonistic approach to the Quranic parallel accounts shares many of the problems that led to the rejection of harmonistic readings of the Hebrew Bible or of the New Testament.¹⁹ Ultimately, in reconstructing what really happened by combining all parallel accounts, the harmonists create a new version which is incompatible with all the other ones.²⁰ Moreover, by ignoring the literary units in which the various versions occur, the harmonistic synthesis decontextualizes the Quranic retellings.²¹

2.3 *Oral Variations*

Another way of understanding the phenomenon of parallel accounts would be in light of the oral nature of the Quran. Several scholars have noted affinities between the narratives of the Quran and folkloristic storytelling. Commenting on discrepancies between the Quranic stories and their Biblical counterparts, Haim Schwarzbaum has noted that

Muhammad's deviations from the Biblical pattern or from the Biblical text would seem quite natural and even reasonable to anyone who has even a moderate acquaintance with the basic laws of oral storytelling, as well as of oral transmission and diffusion of tales. Stories which are merely dependent upon human memory for their preservation are quite different from textually fixed tales. Muhammad's Jewish and Christian informants... did not stick to any fixed, written, literary text. They behaved in the same way as all *Quṣṣāṣ* (storytellers) do since time immemorial: they tell their stories in a free, spontaneous manner.²²

¹⁸ For a recent description of this approach, see Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs*, 49–50. A twentieth-century argument in favor of harmonistic readings may be found in al-Khaṭīb, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-qur’ānī*, 230–75. See also my discussion of Nicolai Sinai's work below.

¹⁹ Of course the problem is not as pervasive in the Quran. Nonetheless, one does find in it several parallel accounts which differ in details and at times contradict each other. The exegetes often read these accounts in a harmonistic fashion which I find unconvincing. I hope to elaborate on this in a future study.

²⁰ For harmonistic readings of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, see Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 13–27, especially 19.

²¹ See the critique of Leemhuis in Ahmed, “Lot's Daughters,” 412.

²² Schwarzbaum, *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Legends*, 12.

Though Schwarbaum limits his comments to what he terms somewhat crudely “Muhammad’s informants,” one could also apply a similar logic to the Quran itself. This is exactly what another folklorist, Alan Dundes, does in a heavily flawed but interesting book. Dundes draws on the work of Parry and Lord regarding the use of formulas in oral composition to understand the Quran.²³ According to Parry and Lord, “oral poetry” is not fully recited from memory but rather is recomposed during each performance. This procedure is aided by a thesaurus of formulaic phrases which allow the reciter/poet to find the right words under conditions of stress. This then would explain why the parallel versions in the Quran are never entirely identical.²⁴

Angelika Neuwirth has briefly argued against the broad applicability of this theory to the Quran, stressing the origin of some suras in nocturnal vigils rather than in public performances, and emphasizing that later suras are devoid of mnemonic devices and therefore seem to betray an immediate fixing in writing or even their being written compositions to begin with.²⁵ Even if one accepts this inconclusive criticism, it should not lead to a complete rejection of the oral model. It should be kept in mind that in many antique and late antique cultures there is hardly a complete and utter divide between oral and literary works; rather one finds a continuum in which written works might display oral characteristics.²⁶

There is, however, a different problem with the oral variations model: the assumption that when pre-existing material is retold orally, small changes occur naturally, does not supply a full explanation for the differences between

²³ Dundes, *Fables of the Ancients?*.

²⁴ See Lord, *The Singer of Tales*. My short characterization of Parry and Lord’s work is indebted to the remarks of Angelika Neuwirth (see below). See also Donner’s comment regarding Wansbrough’s theory of variant regional versions: “But, might such similar passages not just as cogently be viewed as transcripts of different *oral* recitations of the same story made in close succession, something like different recordings of a politician’s stump speech delivered numerous times over a few days or weeks” (Donner, “The Qur’ān in Recent Scholarship,” 34; cited and criticized in Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 130).

²⁵ Neuwirth, “Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features,” 101.

²⁶ For a nuanced discussion of oral aspects of the Hebrew Bible, see Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*. See also the insightful reaction to Neuwirth in Dayeh, “Al-Ḥawāmīm,” 496–70:

“Thus, the literary and technological conditions in which the Qur’ānic text emerged shaped the way in which it was composed. Residues of oral literature, such as public speech and persuasion, and formulaic language, are evident throughout the Qur’ān. One may describe Qur’ānic composition as a *literaturization* of ancient Arabic rhetoric.”

parallel Quranic accounts. The question is whether these changes are always completely random or whether in some cases there is a discernible logic.²⁷

2.4 *Adaptation to Context*

The contextual approach argues that the context in which the parallel passages are embedded can explain the differences between them. Whitney Bodman has recently applied this method to an examination of the story of Iblīs in the Quran.²⁸ The basic idea is known to Western scholarship and is to be found in traditional works as well.²⁹

The traditional sciences of the Quran include a genre dedicated to the collection and analysis of nearly identical verses. A common term for this phenomenon is *al-mutashābih al-lafzī*, to be distinguished from the famous ambiguous verses known as the *mutashābihāt*.³⁰ Whereas some of the works in this genre are mere reference works meant as mnemonical aids, others attempt to explain the minor variations and differences between parallel verses. The variations treated typically include additions/omissions and changes in the order of words, in the use of the definite article, number, gender, tense, verb forms, etc.³¹

Though many of the explanations given in these works may seem fanciful and artificial to the modern reader, these books are valuable for studying the Quran as concordances of parallel passages and more particularly for their careful attention to the subtle differences between parallel passages. Characteristic of the *mutashābih* genre is a contextual approach, which explains the unique aspects of individual accounts as reflecting the vocabulary and themes of their suras. This insight proves itself quite convincing as we shall soon see. It is in fact better attested to than the works in this genre suggest. The contextual approach displayed in these works is most valuable, in spirit if not in detail,

²⁷ Cf. the interest of Hermann Gunkel in the dynamics of variant development in the Bible and its background in the field of folklore as described in Nahkola, *Double Narratives in the Old Testament*, 134–50.

²⁸ Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs*.

²⁹ See, e.g., Kadi and Mir, “Literature and the Qur’ān,” EQ, 212. An example of a Western study often ignored in this context is Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa*. Though Prenner follows his teacher, Claus Schedl, in applying his extremely odd logotechnical method to the Quran, other aspects of Prenner’s study are useful, especially his reading of individual versions of the Moses narrative in the larger context of the suras in which they appear.

³⁰ For the meaning of *tashābuh* in the Quran, see my comments in the conclusions.

³¹ Surveys of this genre are found in al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, 1:112–54 (*naw’ 5*) and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 5:1865–72 (*naw’ 63*, where the term is *al-āyāt al-mushtabihāt*). A comprehensive study is found in a recent Saudi dissertation: al-Shīthrī, *al-Mutashābih al-lafzī*.

as it sheds light on the ways in which the Quran adapted and reworked its materials.³²

Perhaps the most substantial argument for the contextual approach is found in the work of Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalafallāh.³³ Submitted as a dissertation in 1947 to the Fuad University in Cairo, only to be rejected, *al-Fann al-qaṣaṣī fī l-Qur'ān al-karīm* was eventually printed in several editions. The major argument of the author is that the Quranic narratives are to be understood as literature rather than history. The parallel accounts hold a central position in Khalafallāh's evidence. He demonstrates how the Quran freely tells the same story in different, and at times contradicting, manners in order to emphasize various homiletical points.³⁴ Khalafallāh stresses numerous times that parallel accounts should not be harmonized but rather are to be treated as independent stories, which the Quran formulates with artistic freedom in order to drive home different messages.³⁵ These messages are determined by the goal

³² Nonetheless, these works are only rarely referred to in Western Quranic studies. Recently Islam Dayeh has highlighted the usefulness of such works for studying the formulae of the Quran. I quote from the conclusions to his article:

“This study suggests that quite often the *literary student* of the Qur'an has more to benefit from a critical and resourceful reading of the traditional exegetical literature than from much of modern Qur'anic scholarship. The difference between the two approaches is the difference between the view that the text is a finely interconnected whole, as our quoted exegetes assumed, and the view that it is a patchwork of miscellaneous texts, as most contemporary scholars assume. (Dayeh, 'Al-Ḥawāmi'ī', 494.)”

Though the works in the *mutashābih* genre contain valuable observations, they must be used critically on account of their limitations. First, they are limited in scope in that they do not aim to study all intra-Quranic parallels, only those whose language is close enough to be considered *mutashābih*. That is, near identity in language is a prerequisite for differences to be studied. Second, most often these works offer extremely clever yet artificial explanations for what seem to be random variations. Thus they are often troubled by the variation between *wāw* and *fā'* and attempt to explain why one context would require the former and another the latter, though the high occurrence of this variation should suggest that both conjunctions may at times be used interchangeably in the Quran.

³³ For his revolutionary work and the debates it caused, see Jomier, “Quelques positions”; Aḥmad, “Die Auseinandersetzung,” 55–64; Wielandt, *Offenbarung und Geschichte*, 134–52; and Abu Zayd, “The Dilemma.”

³⁴ Curiously, the work of Khalafallāh is not mentioned in a recent idiosyncratic book which shares several of his ideas: Nouryeh, *The Art of Narrative in the Holy Qur'ān*.

³⁵ See, e.g., Khalafallāh, *al-Fann al-qaṣaṣī*, 64.

of the sura in which a specific account is embedded and can be revealed by a study of the literary context.³⁶

Though Khalafallāh's work has attracted the attention of scholars of twentieth-century Egypt and modern *tafsīr*, only rarely does Western scholarship on the Quran take his work into account.³⁷ Its limitations (such as its polemical tone and its lack of interest in pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian versions of Biblical narratives)³⁸ are clearly outweighed by its merits.

Khalafallāh applied his insight to explain changes introduced consciously and intentionally. It is, however, possible to use the contextual approach also to explain small changes in phraseology that carry no great meaning and may have occurred naturally or unintentionally.

2.5 *Diachronic Explanations*

I proceed now to what might be designated the diachronic approach. Its most recent and successful advocates are Angelika Neuwirth and her former student Nicolai Sinai.³⁹ Emphasizing the importance of studying the Quran chronologically, they are interested in examining how later suras develop and interpret motifs that appeared in earlier suras. Thus, they argue, we find different accounts of the same stories because the Quran is constantly updating itself and its message, preserving both early and late communications. Whereas Neuwirth emphasizes the way stories are retold to reflect the changing con-

³⁶ Though I emphasize the contextual aspect of Khalafallāh's study, it should be noted that it also includes chronological aspects (taking the Cairo edition's chronology as the basis; see Khalafallāh, *al-Fann al-qasaṣī*, 44–5). In fact the last two chapters of the book are devoted to the development of the narrative art of the Quran over time and to the narratives as reflecting the psychological state of the Prophet in different historical circumstances.

³⁷ For a recent call to do so, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, 114–6.

³⁸ As part of his argument against the historical accuracy of the Quranic accounts, Khalafallāh posits that, in trying to convince its audience, the Quran does not aim at recounting what really happened but rather what the audience or the experts among them, e.g., the Jews of Arabia, believed to have happened. Nonetheless, Khalafallāh hardly displays any interest in examining Jewish (and Christian) sources (see Khalafallāh, *al-Fann al-qasaṣī*, 45). Exceptional are three brief references to entries ("Aṣḥāb al-kahf," "Ilyās," and "Ibrāhīm") in the Arabic translation of the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (see Khalafallāh, *al-Fann al-qasaṣī*, 208; 209; 220). See also the comment in Jomier, "Quelques positions," 52. For a critique of his failure to take Western scholarship concerning chronology into consideration, see 'Abd al-Karīm, *Arḍ wa-taḥlīl*, 370–1.

³⁹ Neuwirth's approach is found in many of her articles as well as in her two most recent books: *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike* and *Der Koran: Bd. 1: Frühmekkanische Suren*. For Sinai, see his *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, and Sinai, "The Qur'an as Process." See also Tillschneider, review of *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, by Nicolai Sinai.

cerns of the growing community, Sinai stresses the pure exegetical motivation of some re-readings.⁴⁰

Although the diachronic approach is in many instances convincing, a few comments are in place. First, both Neuwirth and Sinai examine the relationship between parallel accounts in light of their independent dating of the suras. Since this dating is not beyond criticism in itself,⁴¹ and moreover can often not establish the priority of one sura over another,⁴² I would like to suggest here that we use the study of parallel passages as another tool for establishing the relative chronology of at least some suras or passages. I thus suggest giving philology more weight alongside style and content. This idea is of course not new, as the quotation from Nöldeke at the beginning of the article indicates. It has not, however, been implemented systematically.

Second, pre-Islamic traditions require more attention in this context. While Neuwirth and Sinai are definitely interested in reading the Quran in light of late antique traditions, there is more that needs to be done in this direction. As we shall see, attention to pre-Islamic traditions may at times help us understand the relationship between parallel Quranic accounts.⁴³

Third, I would argue that we should focus on the differences and points of tension between parallel texts and try to see what we can learn from them. Slight linguistic variations may provide us with important philological hints.

40 Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 76.

41 For an opposing view, see Reynolds, "Le problème de la chronologie du Coran," and Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 3–22. Reynolds, who is influenced by the work of Wansbrough, links the issue of dating to his larger argument that the Quran should not be read through the lenses of *sīra* and *tafsīr*. He demonstrates how the reading of specific passages in light of the Prophet's life is unfounded, but makes no attempt to explain away the data adduced by Nöldeke and his followers and does not account for the very different atmosphere one encounters in the so-called "Meccan" and "Medinan" suras. Systematic presentations and defenses of the chronological approach to the Quran are found in Sinai's work and in Sadeghi, "The Chronology of the Qur'ān."

42 Using a stylometric approach, Sadeghi (*ibid.*) aims to establish a relative chronology of suras in seven phases. Nonetheless he stresses that "the sequence is valid in an *average* sense only. Deviations from averages, as well as outlier behavior, are typical for phenomena complex enough to merit statistical analysis" (*ibid.*, 284). What this effectively means is that, at least at this stage, this approach cannot determine a firm relative chronology between specific passages. The same is true of the work of Nöldeke and his followers.

43 A similar point is made in Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*. See, for example, his critique of Sinai (93).

Sinai's work, on the other hand, tends to emphasize examples which can be read in a complementary harmonistic way.⁴⁴

Fourth, the model used by the chronological school of thought is too linear. Other, more complicated, possible scenarios are not given due attention. Might not two given suras have a give and take relationship in which they influence each other over an extended period of formation? Alternatively, could not parallel passages result from different applications of older shared material, without one passage being directly dependant on the other?

2.6 *Written Revisions after the Death of the Prophet*

A variant on the diachronic approach is presented in a recent study of the Quran by a Bible scholar, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann.⁴⁵ Like Neuwirth and Sinai, Pohlmann studies the Quran chronologically, with two major differences: he posits multiple authors and believes that some of the variants are best explained as reflecting scholarly revisions of written texts, in certain cases on the basis of a close acquaintance with Biblical and post-Biblical traditions. Thus applying insights from Biblical criticism to the Quran, Pohlmann argues for a long process of textual revision and reworking by several hands.⁴⁶ This

44 Sinai states his position explicitly:

"Die Frage ist deshalb nicht trivial, weil substantielle Widersprüche zwischen verschiedenen koranischen Schilderungen eines Ereignisses m. E. recht selten sind; in den meisten Fällen ist eine harmonisierende Lesarten zumindest möglich... Sofern solche harmonisierenden Lesarten nicht allzu spitzfindig werden, sind sie generell vorzuziehen – zumindest, wenn man davon ausgeht, dass frühere Korantexte weiterhin in Gebrauch blieben und damit allgemein bekannt waren, die betreffenden Widersprüche also kaum unbemerkt geblieben wären. (Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 126–7, note 12.)"

See also *ibid.*, 121.

45 Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*.

46 Regarding the Adam story, Pohlmann assumes that the later authors were converts with a good knowledge of Jewish and Christian lore (*ibid.*, 143). Another recent study, which advocates the implementation of Biblical criticism, more exactly New Testament form criticism, in the study of the Quran is Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 138–58. Shoemaker's conclusion parallels a major argument of Pohlmann's:

"Even if the application of such a hermeneutics of suspicion may ultimately determine that much of the Qur'an can be in some sense ascribed to Muhammad, it must be allowed that additions and modifications may have been made by the community during the process of the text's transmission and formation, as was the case with the sacred scriptures of other religious traditions. (*Ibid.*, 158.)"

Whereas Shoemaker presents a forceful theoretical case for adopting a hermeneutics of suspicion in the study of the Quran, his application of this hermeneutics to the text leaves

process is said to have lasted until well after the Prophet's death. At the very center of the author's argument stand the intra-Quranic parallels.⁴⁷ Though the book contains many valuable detailed textual observations, it is marred by an exaggerated tendency to identify later interpolations.⁴⁸ Whether or not his larger claims can be proven remains to be seen.

3 Case Studies

What I will proceed to do now is to examine two cases of closely worded parallels which nonetheless carry different meanings. Since both examples concern Biblical traditions, I will use pre-Islamic Biblical traditions as a standard or starting point which might suggest to us how a tradition evolved in the Quran.

Both examples occur in Q 7 and Q 20. The relationship between these two suras is debated. Whereas Nöldeke and his followers place Q 20 in the second Meccan period and Q 7 in the third Meccan period,⁴⁹ the traditional Islamic lists usually place Q 7 before Q 20.⁵⁰ Hopefully, the discussion which follows will shed new light on this question or at least reopen the issue.

much to be desired. Thus, in identifying late interpolations in the Quran, Shoemaker neglects to consider how they fit their immediate literary context and whether their removal causes syntactical problems. See, for example, his discussion of Q 33:63, Q 72:25, and Q 3:144.

⁴⁷ He focuses on three narratives, those of Iblis, Moses, and Jesus.

⁴⁸ The rather harsh comments of a reviewer of Pohlmann's *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel* (Commentary to Ezekiel) are of interest here. Referring to Pohlmann as a representative of "radical, old-fashioned *Literarkritiker*," he writes: "Their declared aim is to explain the OT writings, especially the prophetic books, in terms of subsequently added textual layers, and to understand the bulk of the text as being 'late,' that is, exilic or postexilic and hardly echoing anything of the original prophet's voice." The reviewer then proceeds to characterize Pohlmann's claims as "exaggerated and too speculative to convince" (Lang, review of *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel*, 524–6). I thank Angelika Neuwirth for drawing my attention to this review.

⁴⁹ Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 1:124–6 and 158–60.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1:59–61. See also the summary in Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 69–72. (There was, however, an opinion attributed to Ibn 'Abbās that viewed Q 7 as Medinan and thus later than Q 20; cf. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 1:61).

3.1 *The Quranic Accounts of the Fall*⁵¹

The Quran relates the Adam story several times.⁵² Only three of these passages include the sin of Adam and his wife, namely Q 2, Q 7, and Q 20.⁵³

*Q 2*⁵⁴

(35) And We said: “O Adam, inhabit you and your wife the Garden, and eat thereof abundantly (*raghadan*) where you desire; but come not near this tree, lest you be of the evildoers.” (36) Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom (*fa-azallahumā ‘anhā*)⁵⁵ and brought them out of that they were in; and We said: “Descend (*ihibitū*), each of you an enemy to each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time.” (37) Thereafter Adam received certain words (*kalimāt*) from his Lord, and He turned towards him; truly He is the Most-Relenting, the All-Compassionate. (38) We said: “Descend from it, all together; and if there come to you guidance from Me, then whosoever follows My guidance, no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow. (39) As for the unbelievers who cry lies to Our signs, those shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, therein dwelling forever.”

Q 7

(19) “O Adam, inhabit you and your wife the Garden, and eat of where you desire, but come not near this tree, lest you be of the evildoers.” (20) Then Satan whispered to them to reveal to them that which was hidden from them of their shameful parts. He said: “Your Lord has only prohibited this tree to you lest you become angels (*malakayni*), or lest you become of the immortals (*al-khālidīna*).” (21) And he swore to them: “Truly, I am of those

⁵¹ An earlier version of this section is found in Witztum, “The Syriac Milieu of the Quran,” 69–79.

⁵² Q 2.30–9, Q 7.10–28, Q 15.26–48, Q 17.61–5, Q 18.50–1, Q 20.115–26, and Q 38.67–85.

⁵³ In all three accounts the sin in the garden is preceded by the refusal of Iblis to bow down before Adam. For the sake of simplicity I do not discuss that episode in this essay. Only in the case of Q 20 do I include it in the translation since it is necessary to understand that version of the story.

⁵⁴ Quotations from the Quran are usually adapted from the translation of Arberry.

⁵⁵ The variant reading of the consonantal skeleton attributed to a few readers, *fa-azālahumā*, seems secondary; see discussion in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 1:560–1. Apart from Q 2.36, the root *z-l-l* occurs three times (Q 2.209, Q 3.155, and Q 16.94). In both Q 2.208–9 and Q 3.155 it is related to the actions of Satan. The language of slipping is used in Syriac sources with regard to Adam and Eve and Satan (Witztum, “The Syriac Milieu of the Quran,” 110, note 41).

who wish you well (*innī lakumā la-min al-nāṣihīnā*).” (22) So he led them on by delusion (*fa-dallāhumā bi-ghurūrin*);⁵⁶ and when they tasted the tree, their shameful parts became apparent to them, so they took to stitching upon themselves leaves of the Garden. And their Lord called to them (*wa-nādāhumā*): “Did I not prohibit this (*tilkumā*) tree to you, and say to you: ‘Verily Satan is for you a manifest foe?’” (23) They said: “Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the lost.”⁵⁷ (24) Said He: “Descend, each of you an enemy to each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time.” (25) Said He: “Therein you shall live, and therein you shall die, and from there you shall be brought forth.”

Q 20

(115) And We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot, and We found in him no constancy. (116) And when We said to the angels: “Bow down before Adam,” they bowed down, save Iblīs; he refused. (117) Then We said: “Adam, surely this one is an enemy to you and your wife (*'aduwwun laka wa-li-zawjika*). So let him not expel you both from the Garden so that you become unprosperous (*fa-tashqā*). (118) It is assuredly given to you neither to hunger therein, nor to go naked (*ta'rā*), (119) neither to thirst therein, nor to suffer the sun.” (120) Then Satan whispered to him saying: “O Adam, shall I point you to the tree of immortality and to a kingdom⁵⁸ that decays not? (*hal adulluka 'alā shajarati l-khuldi wa-mulkīn lā yablā*)” (121) So the two of them ate of it, and their shameful parts became apparent to them so they took to stitching upon themselves leaves of the Garden. And Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred. (122) Thereafter his Lord chose him, and turned towards him, and He guided him. (123) Said He: “Descend (*ihibitā*) from it, together, each of you an enemy to each; but if there come to you guidance from Me, then

56 The meaning of the verb *dallā* in this context is unclear; see Lane, *Arabic – English Lexicon*, 1:908. As it stands its root is *d-l-w*. Noting the occurrence of *dalla* (“to direct”) in Q 20.120, Bell in his translation considered the emendation *fa-dallahumā* (Bell, *The Qurān*, 1:38, note 3). A derivation from *d-l-l* was suggested already by Abū Maṣ'ūr al-Azharī (d. 980), though without emending the text and with a different meaning (“emboldened”); see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 14:49, and Lane, *Arabic – English Lexicon*, 1:908. One might also want to consider reading the word in light of *fa-azallahumā* in Q 2.36.

57 Q 11.47 uses almost identical language. Note also that God’s response in Q 11.48 opens with “O Noah descend . . .” and refers to God giving people enjoyment, as does Q 7.24.

58 Alternatively, one could follow Beck, “Iblis und Mensch,” 240, in translating *mulk* as “possession” (“Besitz”) in light of Q 4.54 and Q 76.20.

whosoever follows My guidance shall not go astray, neither shall he be unprosperous (*yashqā*); (124) but whosoever turns away from My remembrance (*wa-man a'rada 'an dhikrī*), his shall be a life of narrowness, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him blind."

The three accounts are different, yet similar enough for us to reject the idea that they developed independently. How then are the differences to be understood? A partial explanation is found in the fact that each account is formulated in a way that fits both the themes and the phraseology of its wider literary context.⁵⁹ This demonstrates that these suras have at least some degree of coherence.⁶⁰

59 As for themes, the emphasis in Q 7.20 concerning Satan's goal of divesting Adam and Eve of their clothes is repeated in Q 7.27 as part of an admonition to the children of Adam (i.e., humanity) to avoid the temptations of Satan. Specifically targeted is a presumably pagan practice of attending places of worship in the nude (Q 7.31). This was noted by Neuwirth (see the articles cited below). As for phraseology, the following examples are noteworthy: 1) In Q 2.35 God permits Adam and Eve to eat from the Garden *abundantly* (*raghadan*); in Q 7.19 this adverb is missing. Compare with Q 2.58, which has *raghadan*, and its parallel in Q 7.161, which does not. 2) The intriguing reference in Q 2.37 to words (*kalimat*) which Adam received from God has a parallel in Q 2.124 where God tests Adam with words. 3) The ending of Q 2.38 ("no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow") differs from that of Q 20.123 and is a phrase which occurs in Q 2.62, 112, 262, 274, and 277. In the rest of the Quran it occurs only in six verses (Q 3.170, Q 5.69, Q 6.48, Q 7.35, Q 10.62, and Q 46.13). 4) Satan's reassurance that he wishes Adam and Eve well is unique to Q 7.21. The root *n-ṣ-h* occurs 13 times in the Quran, six of them in Q 7 (vv. 21, 62, 68, 79 [twice], and 93). It is not found in Q 2 or Q 20. Compare the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve*, chapter 18 (Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:279), cited in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 69. 5) In a sentence unique to Q 7.22, we read that God called out to Adam and Eve (*nādāhumā*): "Did I not prohibit this (*tilkumā*) tree to you?" The same verb is used five more times in Q 7 (vv. 43, 44, 46, 48, and 50). In the other two suras it is used only once (Q 2.171 and Q 20.11). More importantly, only in Q 7.22 and Q 7.43 do we find the variant forms of the demonstrative *tilkum(ā)*; in all other verses the form is *tilka*. 6) The reference to Adam's forgetting in Q 20.115 is reminiscent of Q 20.52, 88, and 126; see discussion in Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 89. 7) The verb *shaqīya* occurs twelve times in the Quran, three times in Q 20 (vv. 2, 117, and 123). It does not occur at all in Q 2 or Q 7. 8) Satan's question, "shall I point you to...?", in Q 20.120 uses the same language that Moses' sister uses in Q 20.40. Note that in both cases this question follows shortly after a reference to an enemy of two people (Q 20.117 and Q 20.39). 9) For "but whosoever turns away from My remembrance" in Q 20.124, compare Q 20.99–100.

60 For scholarship on the coherence of suras, see Witztum, "The Syriac Milieu of the Quran," 266–9.

Of the three accounts Q 7 is in several aspects closest to the Biblical account and its later Jewish and specifically Christian embellishments, as I have shown elsewhere.⁶¹ Let us now examine the literary relationship between the three passages.

The relationship between the Quranic Adam accounts has been studied by Beck and by Neuwirth, using different approaches and arriving at different conclusions.⁶² Beck's article is primarily devoted to a close philological reading of the Iblis and Adam stories with references to Syriac parallels. His main goal is to establish the literary relationship between the various Quranic passages. Neuwirth too is interested in this, but unlike Beck, she also examines the relationship of each account to the sura in which it occurs, the meaning each account had for its first listeners, and the progress of the canonization process.⁶³

The following table offers a synopsis of the parallel Arabic texts:⁶⁴

Q 2	Q 20	Q 7
(35) وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغْدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتَمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ	(117) فَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ إِنَّ هَذَا عَدُوٌّ لَكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ فَلَا يُمْرِنُ جَنَّكَ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ فَتَشَفَّعِي	(19) وَيَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَرَزْوَجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتَمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

61 Ibid., 80–110.

62 Beck, "Iblis und Mensch," 195–244; Neuwirth, "Negotiating Justice (Part 1)"; Neuwirth, "Negotiating Justice (Part II)"; Neuwirth, "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory." See also Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 86–96. Recently two studies have been devoted to the Adam stories in the Quran: Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs*, and Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 81–146.

63 Neuwirth has the following to say about Beck's study:

"The study by Beck... discusses the cosmogonic accounts elucidating them by extra-Qur'ānic evidence. Its value as an analysis unfolding the 'development of a Qur'ānic narrative' is, however, reduced by its obsolete literary approach which presents the Qur'ān as authored by Muḥammad and depending directly on particular older religious texts, Jewish and Christian. (Neuwirth, "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory," 126, note 36.)"

In my opinion, this downplays Beck's philological contributions. Pohlmann's analysis of the texts, on the other hand, is indebted to Beck, though his model is quite different.

64 The table includes only the account of the sin in the garden. Some verses before and after have been omitted in order to present the material in a more manageable fashion.

(cont.)

Q 2

Q 20

Q 7

(١١٨) إِنَّ لَكَ أَلَا تَجُوعَ فِيهَا

وَلَا تَعْرِي

(١١٩) وَإِنَّكَ لَا تَظْمَأُ فِيهَا

وَلَا تَضْحَى

(٢٠) فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ

(٢٠) فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ

الشَّيْطَانُ

لِيُبَدِّيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُرِيَ

عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوَاءٍ هُمَا

وَقَالَ مَا نَهَا كَارِبُكُمَا عَنْ

هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا

مَلَكِينَ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ

(٢١) وَفَاسِمَهُمَا إِيْنِي لَكُمَا لِيَنْ

الثَّاصِحِينَ

(٢٢) فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ

(٣٦) فَأَزَّلَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ

عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا

فِيهِ

(١٢١) فَأَكَلَا مِنْهَا فَبَدَتْ

لَهُمَا سَوَاءٌ هُمَا وَطَفِيقًا يَخْصِفَانَ لَهُمَا سَوَاءٌ هُمَا وَطَفِيقًا

عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ

الْجَنَّةِ

وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَّا إِنْهُمَا

عَنْ تِلْكَا الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقْلَ لَكُمَا

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ

مُبِينٌ

Q 2	Q 20	Q 7
	وَعَصَى آدُمْ رَبَّهُ فَغَوَى (122) ثُمَّ اجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ وَهَدَى	فَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمَنَا أَنفُسَنَا (23) وَانْ لَمْ تَعْفِرْ لَنَا وَرَحَنَا لِنَكُونَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ (24) قَالَ اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقْرٌ وَمَنَاعٌ إِلَى حِينٍ
وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عُدُوٌّ وَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقْرٌ وَمَنَاعٌ إِلَى حِينٍ (37) فَتَلَقَى آدُمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَهَّا تِ قَاتَبَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْتَّوَابُ الرَّحِيمُ		
(38) قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِنَّمَا يَأْتِيَكُمْ مِنْ هُدًى فَمَنْ فَنَّ تَعَّبَ هُدَايَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْرِزُونَ (39) وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِإِيمَانِنَا أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ	(123) قَالَ اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ فَإِنَّمَا يَأْتِيَكُمْ مِنْ هُدًى فَمَنْ اتَّبَعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَى (124) وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّهُ لَمَعِيشَةً ضَنَكاً وَخَسِرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى	

Beck and Neuwirth agree that the account in Q 2 is the latest of the three and that it uses both Q 7 and Q 20. This is most evident in a glaring redundancy created by the repetition of God's command in Q 2.36 and 38:

(36) Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom and brought them out of that they were in; and We said: “*Descend*, each of you an enemy to each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time.” (37) Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He turned towards him; truly He is the Most-Relenting, the All-Compassionate. (38) We said: “*Descend from it*, all together; and if there come to you guidance from Me, then whosoever follows My guidance, no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow.”

Why did God repeat the order to fall? The exegetes offer several answers, all of which are artificial. According to the Mu‘tazilī al-Jubbā‘ī (d. 915), the descent was in two stages, from Paradise to the lower heaven and from the lower heaven to Earth.⁶⁵ Another explanation cited by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is that the order was repeated for mere emphasis. Al-Rāzī offers yet another interpretation according to which the second command in verse 38 was needed to dispel Adam and Eve’s false impression that, since their repentance was accepted (v. 37) immediately after the first command (verse 36), they no longer needed to descend to Earth.⁶⁶

The actual reason for the redundancy becomes clear when we notice that the account in Q 2.35–9 is built on a combination of the accounts in Q 7.19–25 and Q 20.117–23.⁶⁷ In those accounts the order “descend” occurs only once, each time worded differently. Q 2 preserves both versions. The command in verse 36 is word for word that of Q 7.24, whereas the command in verse 38 is extremely close to Q 20.123. Compare the verses:

Q 2.36

Q 7.24

قالَ أهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ
وَقُلْنَا أهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ
وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَيْ حِينٍ
وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَيْ حِينٍ

65 See Gimaret, *Une lecture mu’tazilite du Coran*, 85.

66 All three explanations are found in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 3:26. For other explanations, see Ibn ‘Atiyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 1:131.

67 Compare Q 2.35 with Q 7.19; the use of *akhraja* in Q 2.36 and Q 20.117; the second part of Q 2.36 with Q 7.24; Q 2.37 with Q 20.122; Q 2.38 with Q 20.123. Though the indebtedness of Q 2 to Q 7 and Q20 is noted by the scholars who treat this triple account, only Bodman, *The*

Q 2.38

Q 20.123

<p>قُلْنَا اهِبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا</p> <p>فَإِمَّا يَأْتِنَكُمْ مِّنْهُ هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبَعَ هُدَى</p> <p>فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْرُثُونَ</p>	<p>قَالَ اهِبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا</p> <p>بَعْضُكُمْ لِعَصْمٍ عَدُوٌّ</p> <p>فَإِمَّا يَأْتِنَكُمْ مِّنْهُ هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبَعَ هُدَى</p> <p>فَلَا يَضْلُلُ وَلَا يَشْقَى</p>
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In the first set of verses the language is almost identical. In the second there are some departures, but not so many as to obscure the close similarity.⁶⁸ One can only speculate why the latest version of the account wished to preserve both versions of the command. Perhaps conservative editorial practice was at play, though we note that in other instances the reworking in Q 2 was rather free and that much was omitted from it.⁶⁹ What is clear, however, is that, of the three accounts, Q 2 is the latest.⁷⁰ It combines elements from the two earlier versions which stood before it, perhaps in writing, but not necessarily so.⁷¹

Poetics of Iblīs, 233–4, notes its relevance for the redundancy. Cf. Beck, “Iblis und Mensch,” 242; Neuwirth, “Negotiating Justice (Part II),” 12; Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 99 and 101.

68 Q 2.38 departs from Q 20.123 in five ways (highlighted in the table). The following remarks are a partial explanation: 1) The choice of *qulnā* might be due to the use of the same form in Q 2.34, 35, and 36. 2) *ihbiṭū* in the plural rather than the dual could reflect the influence of the parallel in Q 2.36. 3) The omission of *ba’dukum li-ba’din ‘aduwwun* resulted perhaps from the mention of the exact same phrase in v. 36. Repetition is fine but to a degree. 4) The verbal forms *ittaba’a* and *tabi’a* are interchangeable in meaning and differ in spelling only in an *alif*. 5) The ending of Q 2.38 both supplies a rhyme that fits the sura and uses a formulaic phrase that, as we have already noted, is common in Q 2.

69 Alternatively, the use of both versions might result from the wish to respond to problems in Q 7 and Q 20. By citing Q 20 it is emphasized that God accepted the repentance of Adam, a point which is unclear in Q 7. By citing Q 7 it is made clear that the punishment preceded the acceptance of the repentance, unlike the slightly illogical situation we find in Q 20.

70 Theoretically, one could argue that Q 2 was the earliest account and that Q 7 and Q 20 sought to improve it by omitting one of the commands. This, however, is a less economical explanation and seems unlikely.

71 Pohlmann argues that the combination of two versions suggests a scribe working with written copies before his eyes. Although plausible, this is not necessary. One could also

What about Q 7 and Q 20? Which came first? Here the scholars part ways. Whereas Beck believes Q 7 to be earlier,⁷² Neuwirth, following Nöldeke's dating of the suras, thinks that the story in Q 7 presupposes that of Q 20.⁷³ She finds an indication of this in a discrepancy between Q 7.19, where God orders Adam and Eve not to approach the tree, and Q 7.22, where after the sin God scolds them saying: "Did I not forbid this tree to you and did *I not tell you that Satan is a manifest enemy of yours?*" Actually God never said this in Q 7, but He did in Q 20.117! Therefore Q 7 relies on Q 20 here.⁷⁴ Beck, on the other hand, interprets the same data in an opposite manner. According to him, Q 20 seeks to fill in the gap in Q 7.⁷⁵ Neither explanation is evidently superior.⁷⁶

Another indication for Neuwirth that Q 7 relies on Q 20 is that after Adam and his wife admit their sin and beg for mercy in Q 7.22, God does not explicitly accept their plea. Rather He decrees that they leave Paradise (Q 7.23). The acceptance is not mentioned, argues Neuwirth, since it is already known from Q 20.122.⁷⁷ Again Beck has a different interpretation. To him the acceptance of Adam's repentance in Q 20.122 suggests the derivative nature of the account in Q 20 in that it stands in tension with Adam's expulsion in Q 20.123. There is no such tension in Q 7, where Adam and Eve ask for forgiveness (Q 7.23) and receive an answer in the form of an order to leave Paradise (Q 7.24). There it is never stated that God accepted their repentance before the expulsion.⁷⁸

imagine such editing taking place orally. Clear criteria for distinguishing between oral and written practices of composition and editing remain to be established.

⁷² To Pohlmann too this is obvious (Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 105).

⁷³ Interestingly, neither scholar considers the possibility that the two accounts drew on a shared source independently. The reason, no doubt, is to be found in the notion that the Quran reflects the work of one author or one group of authors. There is, however, no real reason to exclude this possibility *a priori*, even if one author is assumed. I thank Daniel Caine for reminding me of this possibility.

⁷⁴ Neuwirth, "Negotiating Justice (Part II)," 8.

⁷⁵ Beck, "Iblis und Mensch," 236. Similarly, Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 105.

⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that the portrayal of Satan as a manifest enemy of mankind is a common Quranic theme. Perhaps it was regarded as public knowledge understood to have been imparted by God.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Neuwirth, "Cosmology," eq.

⁷⁸ Beck, "Iblis und Mensch," 240–1. Genesis makes no mention of Adam repenting. Some sources understand God's question "where are you?" in Genesis 3.9 as granting Adam the opportunity to repent. Adam, however, chooses to blame Eve rather than confess (Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum*, 2.26; Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 7.8; and Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2.24–31). Some post-Biblical retellings do describe Adam's repentance, but this usually takes place outside Paradise long after the sin and there is no immediate acceptance on God's part; see *Genesis Rabba* 22.13 (Adam learns repentance

Beck offers other arguments for Q 7 being earlier than Q 20. Thus he notes that Q 20 assumes two crucial facts without ever stating them: that Adam and Eve were placed in the garden and that God forbade them to approach the tree. These details are, Beck argues, omitted in Q 20 since they were already known from Q 7.⁷⁹ This argument is problematic in that it assumes that the audience was unaware of the story before hearing a Quranic account of it. The highly referential nature of Quranic accounts in general, however, suggests that the audience already knew the Biblical stories in some version before the Quranic accounts were first recited.⁸⁰

A further argument that Beck offers concerns the switching of person in Q 20 between the singular and the dual in referring to Adam (and Eve), whereas Q 7 is consistent in using the dual. This is most evident in the first part of Q 20.121, which in using the dual breaks with both the preceding verses (end

from Cain), BT *Erubin* 18b, BT *Aboda Zara* 8a, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* 20. In the Latin *Life of Adam and Eve*, chapters 4–8, Adam and Eve are led to repentance after searching in vain for food outside Paradise for several days. The closest parallel to the Quran that I have found is in the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve*, chapters 27–9, where after God orders the angels to cast Adam and Eve out of Paradise, Adam begs God's forgiveness, admitting his sin. God then tells the angels to continue driving Adam out and tells Adam that he is no longer allowed to be in Paradise. Adam then asks to eat from the Tree of Life before he is cast out and again God denies his request, adding that if he guards himself from all evil outside Paradise he will be raised in the resurrection and will be given to eat from the Tree of Life. Adam receives God's mercy only after he dies (chapters 33–7); Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:285 and 289–91. In light of the general affinity between the Quranic Adam story and the *Life of Adam and Eve*, it seems likely that Q 7 reflects the same sort of cool response to Adam's plea for mercy. Somewhat parallel to Q 20, though most probably accidentally, is Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.23.5–6, where Adam's hiding from God suggests his recognition of his sin, the wearing of fig leaves demonstrates repentance, God's granting of skin garments reflects mercy, and the expulsion is out of pity rather than envy. A collection of sources on Adam's repentance is found in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 73–7, and Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 5:114–6, note 106.

79 Beck, "Iblis und Mensch," 236 and 240 (similarly, Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 105).

80 Another problem with Beck's argument is that, rather than relying on Q 7 for the prohibition, Q 20 seems to intentionally tell a slightly different story in which there was no prohibition of approaching the tree. Thus the initial warning in Q 20.117 alerts Adam to the danger of Satan with no mention of the tree (compare Q 7.19); in his whispering in Q 20.120 Satan has no need to explain away a prohibition that was never given (compare Q 7.20); and after the eating there is no rebuke for transgressing the Divine command (compare Q 7.22). In this Q 7 is clearly closer to the Biblical account than Q 20 is, and might therefore be earlier. In Q 20 the story is reworked in a way that drifts away from its Biblical origin.

of 117–20) and the following verses (end of 121–2). This is interesting since the part of the verse which breaks the pattern has an almost identical parallel in Q 7.22, a verse in a passage which consistently uses the dual. This suggests to Beck that the story in Q 20 is of an inconsistent and derivative nature.⁸¹

Beck finds yet another indication that Q 20 is later in God's command, "descend." Whereas Q 7.24 (and Q 2.36 and 38) uses the plural *ihibitū*, Q 20.123 uses the dual *ihibitā*. To Beck this is an instance of overcorrection. Since the command is addressed to Adam and Eve one might expect the dual, but, as the continuation of the sentence in the plural shows, the real addressees are Adam and Eve's descendants, i.e., humanity in its entirety. Therefore the plural form is the more original and the dual is an overcorrection which only adds to the confusion in person in Q 20.⁸²

Though Beck's arguments are interesting, they are not decisive and at times are even weak. In what follows I wish to draw attention to one detail which escaped Beck and which suggests that Q 7 preserves a more original reading. Compare Q 7.20 with Q 20.120:

Q 20.120	Q 7.20
فَوَسُوسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبَدِّيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُرِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوْأَتِهِمَا قَالَ يَا آدَمُ مَا نَهَاكَمَا رَبِّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَيْنَ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ	فَوَسُوسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبَدِّيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُرِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوْأَتِهِمَا قَالَ يَا آدَمُ مَا نَهَاكَمَا رَبِّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ

81 Beck, "Iblis und Mensch," 239.

82 Ibid., 241–2. The issue of the identity of the addressees of the command "descend" is more complicated than Beck indicates. He considers only two options: Adam and Eve versus the entirety of humanity, but Satan too might be one of those addressed. The reason to think that Satan is included here is the mention of enmity, which is reminiscent of the cursing of the serpent in Genesis 3.15 ("I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers..."). Beck explains that since evil men take the side of the Devil, the enmity motif can be transferred to describe relationships between humans, but another reading would be to assume that in this sentence Satan too is being addressed.

Whereas in Q 7 Satan claims that eating from the tree would turn Adam and Eve into angels (*malakayni* in the dual) or make them immortal (*min al-khālidīna*), in Q 20 he offers to show Adam the tree of immortality (*shajarat al-khuld*) and a dominion that shall not perish (*mulk lā yablā*). In both verses Satan entices Adam with two promises: angelhood and immortality in Q 7.20, and immortality and dominion in Q 20.120. Though angelhood and dominion are very different concepts, they are expressed by two words which include the consonants *m-l-k*.⁸³ Unlikely to be a mere coincidence, this requires an explanation.

One approach is to read in Q 7.20 *malikayni*, i.e., “kings,” instead of *malakayni*, “angels”.⁸⁴ But this reading, though attested, seems secondary.⁸⁵ In the Quran angelhood is related to immortality, whereas kingship is not. Beck noted Q 21.34 (“We did not assign immortality [*khuld*] to any human [*bashar*] before you . . .”), which implies that angels are in fact possessors of *khuld*.⁸⁶ To this one may add Q 21.8 (“nor did We fashion them as bodies that ate not food, neither were they immortal [*khālidīna*]”), which again assumes that immortality belongs to the angelic realm.⁸⁷ Moreover, angelhood can easily be related

83 Though *malak* (angel) and *malik* (king) are confusingly similar, the root of the former is *l'-k* and that of the latter is *m-l-k*. For an example of a poet who mistakenly believed the root of *malak* to be *m-l-k*, see the entry *l'-k* in Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, 10:482. In Hebrew writings as well one finds confusion and intentional conflation of the two words; see Mizrahi, “‘Kings’ or ‘Messengers’ in 1 Samuel 11:1?” and Kister, “Ancient Material in *Pirqe De-Rabbi Elie'zer*,” 84–6.

84 This reading is attributed to Ibn 'Abbās (d. 686–7), Yahyā b. Abī Kathir (d. ca 749), al-Hasan b. 'Alī, al-Daḥḥāk (d. ca 723), al-Zuhrī (d. 742), and Ya'lā b. Ḥakīm transmitting from Ibn Kathir (d. 738); see Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 4:280. See also al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 10:108, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 14:47 (citing al-Wāḥidī). In addition to harmonizing the two verses, this reading may have been an attempt to avoid a contradiction between the angels’ recognizing Adam’s superiority and his wishing to become one of them. More generally, this reading is related to the debate concerning the status of angels with regard to prophets.

85 For another instance of a variant reading *malikayni* instead of *malakayni*, see the discussion of Q 2.102 in al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam*, 1:164. Interestingly, many of the readers to which this reading is attributed are identical to those mentioned in the previous note. The relationship between the two passages requires further study. See also Q 6.50, Q 11.31, and Q 12.31 and their treatment in al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam* (in these three instances a variant reading *malik* replaces *malak*). I hope to treat all these passages in a separate study.

86 Beck, “Iblis und Mensch,” 239. For the contrast between angels and humans, see Q 12.31 and Q 17.94–5.

87 Compare Q 25.7 (“They also say: ‘What ails this Messenger that he eats food, and goes in the markets? Why has an angel not been sent down to him, to be a warner with him?’”) and Q 23.33 (“Said the council of the unbelievers of his people, who cried lies to the

to the serpent's speech in Genesis, whereas dominion less so. In Genesis 3:5 the serpent says to Eve: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be *like gods* [or *God*] (בְּאֱלֹהִים) . . ." Unsurprisingly, this verse troubled ancient readers. One solution was to render *elohim* here as angels, a reading which found support in other Biblical passages.⁸⁸ This is what we find in Targum Neofiti, a Geniza Targum fragment, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. The Aramaic word used is *mal'akin*.⁸⁹

It would therefore seem that *malakayni* is the better reading in Q 7:20. But, if so, what are we to do with *mulk* in Q 20:120? One might suggest that this is the result of a misreading of MLKYN as *malikayni* for *malakayni*. This type of mistake could indicate that whoever composed or redacted Q 20 was working with Q 7, or a source identical to Q 7 in this detail, in written form. This then would support the scenario envisioned by Pohlmann.⁹⁰ But this conclusion is not necessary. One could also argue that Q 20:120 is a playful adaptation of Q 7:20, using the same consonants to create a new meaning. In any case, it would seem that Q 20 is secondary in this instance.⁹¹

encounter of the world to come, and to whom We had given ease in the present life: 'This is naught but a human like yourselves, who eats of what you eat and drinks of what you drink"). See also Q 25:20.

⁸⁸ In some instances *elohim* either refers to angels or at least has been understood in such a manner by early readers. See, e.g., Psalms 8.6 (rendered as angels in the Septuagint, Peshitta, and Targum), 82.1 (thus in the Peshitta), and 97.7 (thus in the Septuagint and Peshitta). See also the sources collected in Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of 'Sons of God'" 65. Especially relevant for our verse are Genesis 3:22, where God says, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil," and *Genesis Rabba* 21.5 (and parallels). Compare also 2 Samuel 14:17 ("...for my lord the king is like the *angel* of God, discerning *good and evil* . . ."), cited in McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 60, note 6.

⁸⁹ The Arabic translations of Saadiah, Yefet and Yeshu'ah all render *elohim* in Genesis 3:5 as angels; see Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources," 376–82 (where it is incorrectly stated that this rendition cannot be found before the rise of Islam). I have not found this rendition in the Syriac tradition, which following the Peshitta renders the word as "gods." It should be noted that, drawing on Jesus' temptation (Matthew 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13), *Liber Graduum*'s presentation (21.9) of Satan's enticement of Adam (via Eve) includes urging him to acquire wealth and become a king (*malkā*). Though the similarity to the Quranic depiction is most likely coincidental, this parallel poses a challenge to my argument and should be pursued. I am grateful to Serge Ruzer for drawing my attention to this source after this essay was in proofs.

⁹⁰ Pohlmann, however, does not notice the relationship between *mulk* and *malakayni*.

⁹¹ One could offer four possible motivations for the reshaping of angelhood to *mulk* in Q 20. First, the tension between God's command to the angels to bow down before Adam, which implies his superiority, and Satan's enticement of Adam and Eve to become angels, which implies the opposite (see Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 14:47). Second, the influence of Q 20:87, where the Israelites defend themselves before Moses, saying about the calf: *mā akhlafnā maw'idaka bi-malkinā*. Of the seven readers only Nāfi' and

To sum up, Q 2 is clearly the latest of the three accounts. Beck and Neuwirth disagree concerning the relative chronology of Q 7 and Q 20. Beck adduced several arguments in favor of Q 7 as the earliest account, but none are conclusive. I have added another argument which may lend strength to his case. Although it too is speculative, I believe my example is more persuasive in that it concerns two variant forms of a word, only one of which (*malakayni*) makes good sense in its context and fits better with what we know from pre-Islamic traditions. The other form (*mulk*) is best explained as being derived from the first.

Two different conclusions could be drawn from my argument. A minimalist approach would argue that in its account Q 7 preserves one element in a more original form than Q 20 does. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the entire account in Q 7 is earlier.⁹² On the other hand, a maximalist approach would argue that the entire Adam account in Q 7 is earlier, adducing Beck's arguments as supporting evidence.

As noted above the Adam story in Q 7 is closest in several details to the Biblical story and to the subsequent Jewish and Christian embellishments. If we accept the maximalist approach this would suggest the following development: in its first Quranic occurrence the story remained fairly faithful to its pre-Islamic origins, but, eventually, in subsequent occurrences it was adapted and changed as needed. Scholars usually envision an opposite model according to which, as time goes by, the Quran becomes more aware of Biblical traditions, but I see no reason to deny the possibility that at least in some instances the Quran starts out close to the Biblical tradition and in time drifts away from it.⁹³ And indeed the move away from the pre-Islamic tradition is what seems to have happened in the move from *malakayni* to *mulk*.

‘Āsim read *malik*. Abū ‘Amr, Ibn ‘Āmir and Ibn Kathīr read *milk*, whereas Ḥamza and al-Kisā’ī read *mulk*. For more details, see al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam*, 5:479–80. Whether or not these variants are synonymous is debated by the exegetes as is the meaning of the word. Among the meanings put forth for it are “power,” “self-control,” and “possession”; see, e.g., Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 5:231. Third, the impact of *mulk* as something belonging to God (a common theme in the Quran) or as a feature of the paradise of the righteous (see Q 76.20). Finally, the influence of a tradition similar to *Liber Graduum* 21.9 cannot be ruled out entirely (see note 89).

92 One possible scenario is that Q 7 faithfully reflects an earlier shared source which also generated the version found in Q 20. Another possibility is that Q 7 and Q 20 interacted over time and that some elements are more original in one sura and others in another.

93 The classic example given for the Quran’s growing awareness of the Bible is the figure of Ishmael and his relationship to Abraham, or lack thereof. Several scholars have argued that originally Muhammad was unaware that Ishmael was Abraham’s son; only in Medina did he learn this and adapt his references accordingly. For this argument and its problems, see Paret, “Ismā‘il,” *EI*². Also relevant here is the work of Pohlmann and other scholars.

3.2 *The Worship of the Calf*

The following example is taken from the story of the calf. This episode is referred to several times in the Quran, but full narratives appear only in Q 7 and Q 20.⁹⁴ In the quotations which follow a few striking linguistic similarities between the two passages have been highlighted.

Q 7

(138) And We made the Children of Israel pass through the sea, and they came upon a people *cleaving to* idols they had. They said: “Moses, make for us a god, as they have gods.” Said he: “You are surely a people who are ignorant. (139) Surely that which they are engaged upon shall be shattered, and void is what they have been doing.” (140) He said: “What, shall I seek a god for you other than God, who has preferred you above all beings?” (141) And when *We delivered you from* the folk of Pharaoh who were visiting you with evil chastisement, slaying your sons, and sparing your women – and in that was a grievous trial from your Lord. (142) We appointed (*wa-wā‘adnā*) with Moses thirty nights and We completed them with ten, so the appointed time of his Lord was forty nights; and Moses said to his brother Aaron: “Act for me among my people, do right and do not follow the way of the workers of corruption.” (143) When Moses came to Our appointed time and his Lord spoke with him, he said: “O my Lord, show me, that I may behold You!” Said He: “You shall not see Me; but behold the mountain – if it stays fast in its place, then you shall see Me.” And when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble to dust; and Moses fell down swooning. So when he awoke, he said: “Glory be to You! I repent to You; I am the first of the believers.” (144) Said He: “Moses, I have chosen you above all men by My messages and My utterance; take what I have given you, and be of the thankful.” (145) We wrote for him on the Tablets an admonition concerning all things, and an explanation of all things: “So take it forcefully and command your people to take the fairest of it. I shall show you the habitation of the ungodly. (146) I shall turn from My signs those who wax proud in the earth unjustly; though they see every sign, they will not believe in it, and though they see the way of rectitude they will not take it for a way, and though they see the way of error, they will take it for a way. That, because they have cried

⁹⁴ For other Quranic references to the calf episode, see Q 2.51, 54, 92–3, and Q 4.153. Studies focusing on the Quranic portrayal of the sin of the calf include, among others, Hawting, “Calf of Gold”; Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation”; Neuwirth, “‘Oral Scriptures’ in Contact”; and Pregill, “The Living Calf of Sinai.”

lies to Our signs and heeded them not.” (147) Those who cry lies to Our signs, and the encounter in the world to come – their works have failed; shall they be recompensed, except according to the things they have done? (148) And the people of Moses took to them, after him, of their ornaments *a calf* (*‘ijlan*), *a mere body that lowed*. *Did they not see* it spoke not to them, neither guided them upon any way? Yet they took it to them, and were evildoers. (149) When matters became clear to them,⁹⁵ and they saw that they had gone astray, they said: “If our Lord has not mercy on us, and forgives us not, surely we shall be of the lost.” (150) When Moses returned to his people, angry and sorrowful, he said: “Very evil is the thing with which you have replaced me in my absence! *Did you hasten to leave behind* the command of your Lord (*a-‘ajiltum amra rabbikum*)?” He cast down the Tablets, and seized his brother’s head, dragging him towards himself. He said: “Son of my mother, surely the people have abased me, and well nigh slain me. Make not my enemies to gloat over me, and put me not among the people of the evildoers.” (151) He said: “O my Lord, forgive me and my brother and enter us into Your mercy; You are the most merciful of the merciful.” (152) “Surely those who took to themselves the calf (*l-‘ijla*) – anger shall overtake them from their Lord, and abasement in this present life; so We recompense those who are forgers. (153) And those who do evil deeds, then repent thereafter and believe, surely thereafter your Lord is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.” (154) When Moses’ anger abated in him, he took the Tablets and in the inscription of them was guidance, and mercy unto all those who hold their Lord in awe.⁹⁶

Q 20

(80) O Children of Israel, *We delivered you from* your enemy; and *We made an appointment* with you (*wa-wā‘adnākum*) at the right side of the Mount, and sent down on you manna and quails: (81) “Eat of the good things wherewith We have provided you; but exceed not therein, or My anger shall alight on you; and on whomsoever My anger alights, that man is hurled to ruin.⁹⁷ (82) Yet I am All-Forgiving to him who repents and believes, and does righteousness, and at last is guided.” (83) [God said:] “Now what has caused you, O Moses, to *leave* your people behind *in so*

95 This is a free rendition of a difficult phrase: *suqīṭa fī aydihim*. See Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary*, 135, and Paret, *Kommentar*, 174.

96 Although verses 155–9 continue the story, they are omitted here for the sake of brevity. They do not affect my argument.

97 Compare verses 80–1 with Q 7:160, which occurs after the calf story.

great a haste (a'jalaka)?" (84) He answered: "They are treading in my footsteps, while *I have hastened ('ajiltu*) unto You, O my Lord, so that You might be well pleased [with me]."(85) Said He: "Then [know that], verily, in your absence We have put your people to a test, and the Sāmirī has led them astray." (86) Then *Moses returned angry and sorrowful to his people, saying:* "My people, did your Lord not promise you (*ya'idakum*) a fair promise (*wa'dan*)?"⁹⁸ Did the time of the covenant seem so long to you, or did you desire that anger should alight on you from your Lord, so that you failed in your tryst with me (*maw'idi*)?" (87) They said: "We have not failed in our tryst with you of our volition; but we were loaded with burdens of the ornaments of the people, and we cast them, as the Sāmirī also threw them, into the fire." (88) Then he brought out for them *a calf, a mere body that lowed;* and they said: "This is your god, and the god of Moses, whom he has forgotten." (89) What? *Did they not see* that it returned no speech unto them, neither had any power to hurt or profit them? (90) Yet Aaron had aforetime said to them: "My people, you have been tempted by this thing, no more; surely your Lord is the All-Merciful; therefore follow me, and obey my commandment!" (91) They said: "We will not cease to *cleave to* it, until Moses returns to us."⁹⁹ (92) Moses said: "What prevented you, Aaron, when you saw them in error, (93) so that you did not follow after me? Did you then disobey my commandment?" (94) He said: "*Son of my mother, seize* me not by my beard, nor by my *head!* I was fearful that you would say: 'You have divided the Children of Israel, and you have not observed my word.'" (95) Moses said: "And you, Sāmirī, what was your business?" (96) He said: "I beheld what they beheld not, and I seized a handful of dust from the messenger's track, and cast it away. So my soul prompted me." (97) He said: "Depart! It shall be yours all this life to cry 'Untouchable!' And thereafter a tryst awaits you which you cannot fail to keep. Behold your god, *to whom you remained cleaving!* We will surely burn it and scatter its ashes into the sea. (98) Your god is God alone, other than whom there is no god; in His knowledge He embraces everything."

98 Note that the Arabic for "promise" consists of the same root as the words for "appointment" and "tryst". The resemblance is even greater according to those who read *wa-wa'adnākum* in the first form in v. 8o; see al-Khatīb, *Mu'jam*, 5:472. This reading is attested in Q 7.142 and Q 2.51 as well. In any case, the verbs in the first and third form seem to carry a similar meaning here.

99 Verses 88–91 consist of a flashback, which seems out of place.

Q 20

Q 7

(138) وَجَاءُونَا بَيْنِ إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ
فَأَتَوْا عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ يَعْكُفُونَ عَلَىٰ أَصْنَامٍ لَهُمْ
قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى اجْعَلْ لَنَا إِلَهًا كَمَا لَهُمْ

الِّهَةُ قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ قَوْمٌ تَجْهَلُونَ

(139) إِنَّ هُؤُلَاءِ مُتَّبِرُ مَا هُمْ فِيهِ وَبِا طِلْ
مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

(140) قَالَ أَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ أَبْغِيْكُمْ إِلَهًا وَهُوَ
فَضَلَّكُمْ عَلَىٰ الْعَالَمِينَ

(80) يَا بَيْنِ إِسْرَائِيلَ قَدْ أَجْنِنَكُمْ مِنْ
عَدُوكُمْ

(141) وَإِذْ أَجْنِنَكُمْ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ
يُسُومُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يُفْتَنُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ
وَيَسْتَحِيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي ذُلْكُمْ بَلَاءٌ مِنْ
رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ

وَوَاعَدْنَاكُمْ جَانِبَ الطُّورِ الْأَيْمَنَ وَرَتَنَا
عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّ وَالسَّلَوَى

(81) كُلُّوا مِنْ طَبَاتِ مَارِزَقَنَاكُمْ وَلَا
تَطْغُوا فِيهِ فَيَحْلِ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبِي وَمَنْ يَحْلِلُ
عَلَيْهِ غَضَبِي فَقَدْ هَوَى

(82) وَإِنِّي لَغَافَارٌ لِمَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ
صَالِحًا ثُمَّ اهْتَدَى

(83) وَمَا أَعْجَلَكَ عَنْ قَوْمِكَ يَا مُوسَى

(142) وَوَاعَدْنَا مُوسَى ثَلَاثَيْنِ لَيْلَةً
وَأَثْمَمَنَاهَا بِعَشْرِ فَتَمَّ مِيقَاتُ رَبِّهِ
أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً وَقَالَ مُوسَى لِأَخِيهِ هَارُونَ
أَحْلَفْنِي فِي قَوْمِي وَأَصْلِحْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ سَيِّلَ
الْمُفْسِدِينَ

(143) وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَى لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَاهَ

Q 20

Q 7

(84) رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنْظُرْ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنْ
 تَرَانِي وَلَكِنْ انْظُرْ إِلَى الْجَبَلِ فَإِنْ اسْتَفَرْ
 مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ تَرَانِي فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّ رَبُّهُ
 لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكَّاً وَخَرَ مُوسَى صَعِيقًا فَلَمَّا
 أَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ تُبْثُتُ إِلَيْكَ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ
 الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

(144) قَالَ يَا مُوسَى إِنِّي اصْطَفَيْتُكَ عَلَى
 النَّاسِ بِرِسَالَاتِي وَبِكَلَامِي فَخُذْ مَا آتَيْتَكَ
 وَكُنْ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ

(145) وَكَبَّنَا لَهُ فِي الْأَلْوَاحِ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
 مَوْعِظَةً وَنَقْصِيلًا لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ فَخُذْهَا بِقُوَّةٍ
 وَأَمْرُ قَوْمَكَ يَأْخُذُوا بِأَحْسَنِهَا سَأْرِيكُمْ
 دَارَ الْفَاسِقِينَ

(146) سَأَصْرِفُ عَنِ آيَاتِي الَّذِينَ
 يَتَكَبَّرُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَإِنْ يَرَوْا
 كُلَّ آيَةٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَا وَإِنْ يَرَوْا سَبِيلَ
 الرُّشْدِ لَا يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلًا وَإِنْ يَرَوْا سَبِيلَ
 الْغَيْرِ يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلًا ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَذَّابُوا
 بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا عَنْهَا غَافِلِينَ

(147) وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَلِقَاءُ الْآخِرَةِ
 حِيطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ هَلْ يُحْرَرُونَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا
 يَعْمَلُونَ

(148) وَاتَّخَذَ قَوْمٌ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ
حُلَيْمَهُ عِجْلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُوارٌ لَهُ يَرَوَا أَنَّهُ
لَا يُكَلِّهُمْ وَلَا يَهْدِيهِمْ سِيلًا اتَّخَذُوهُ
وَكَانُوا طَالِبِينَ

(149) وَلَمَّا سُقِطَ فِي أَيْدِيهِمْ وَرَأُوا أَنَّهُمْ
قَدْ ضَلُّوا قَالُوا لَئِنْ لَمْ يَرْحَمْنَا رَبُّنَا وَيَغْفِرْ
لَنَا لَكُونَنَا مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

(150) وَلَمَّا رَجَعَ مُوسَىٰ إِلَى قَوْمِهِ غَضِبَانَ أَسْفًا
قَالَ يَا قَوْمَ الَّهِ يَعْدُكُمْ رَبِّكُمْ وَعَدًّا حَسَنًا
أَفَطَالَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْعَهْدُ أَمْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ
يَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُمْ
مَوْعِدِي

(87) قَالُوا مَا أَخْلَفْنَا مَوْعِدَكَ بِمَلْكِنَا
وَلِكَنَا حِلْنَا أَوْرَارًا مِنْ زِينَةِ الْقَوْمِ

فَقَدْ فَنَاهَا فَكَذَّلَكَ أَلْقَى السَّامِريُّ

(88) فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُمْ عِجْلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُوارٌ

فَقَالُوا هَذَا إِلَهُكُمْ وَإِلَهُ مُوسَىٰ فَسَيِّ

(89) أَفَلَا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّا يَرْجِعُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَوْلًا

وَلَا يَمْلِكُ لَهُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا

(90) وَلَقَدْ قَالَ لَهُمْ هَارُونُ مِنْ قَبْلِ يَا

قَوْمٍ إِنَّمَا قُنْتَمِرْتُ بِهِ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ

فَاتَّبِعُونِي وَأَطِيعُوا أَمْرِي

(91) قَالُوا لَنْ تَبْرَحَ عَلَيْهِ عَاكِفِينَ حَتَّىٰ

يَرْجِعَ إِلَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ

(92) قَالَ يَا هَارُونُ مَا مَأْتَنَا إِذٌ

رَأَيْتُمْ ضَلَّوا

(93) أَلَا تَتَبَعُنَّ أَفَعَصَيْتَ أَمْرِي

(94) قَالَ يَا ابْنَ أَمَّا لَا تَأْخُذْ بِلِحْيَتِي وَلَا

بِرَأْسِي إِنِّي خَشِيتُ أَنْ تَقُولَ فَرَقْتَ يَمَّا بَيْ

إِسْرَائِيلَ وَلَمْ تَرْقُبْ قَوْلِي

وَأَخَذَ بِرَأْسِ أَخِيهِ يَحْرُهُ إِلَيْهِ

قَالَ ابْنَ أَمَّا إِنَّ الْقَوْمَ اسْتَضْعَفُونِي وَكَادُوا

يَقْتُلُونِي فَلَا تُشْمِتْ بِي الْأَعْدَاءِ وَلَا

تَجْعَلُنِي مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ

(151) قَالَ رَبِّي أَغْفِرْ لِي وَلَا نَحْيٍ وَأَدْخِلْنَا

فِي رَحْمَتِكَ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

(152) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ احْكَمُوا الْعِجْلَ سَيِّئَاتُهُمْ

غَضَبُ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَذِلَّةٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

وَكَذِلِكَ تَجْزِي الْمُفْتَرِينَ

(153) وَالَّذِينَ عَمِلُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ ثُمَّ تَابُوا

مِنْ بَعْدِهَا وَآمَنُوا إِنَّ رَبَّكَ مِنْ بَعْدِهَا

لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

(154) وَلَمَّا سَكَتَ عَنْ مُوسَى الْفَضَبُ

أَخَذَ الْأَلْوَاحَ وَفِي نُسْخَتِهَا هُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ

لِلَّذِينَ هُمْ لِرَبِّهِمْ يَرْهُونَ

(95) قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكَ يَا سَامِرِيُّ

(96) قَالَ بَصُرْتُ بِمَا لَمْ يَبْصُرُوا إِلَيْهِ

فَقَبَضْتُ قَبْصَةً مِنْ أَثْرِ الرَّسُولِ فَبَدَّتْهَا

وَكَذِلِكَ سَوَّلَتْ لِي نَفْسِي

(97) قَالَ فَأَذْهَبْ فَإِنَّ لَكَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ أَنْ

تَقُولَ لَا مِسَاسَ وَإِنَّ لَكَ مَوْعِدًا لَنْ تُخْلَفَهُ

وَانْظُرْ إِلَى إِلَهِكَ الَّذِي ظَلَّتْ عَلَيْهِ عَاكِفًا

لَنْ حِرَقْنَاهُ ثُمَّ لَنْ تَسْفِنَهُ فِي الْيَمِّ نَسْفًا

(98) إِنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهٌ إِلَّا هُوَ

وَسِعَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا

The linguistic similarity suggests that the two versions must be related and cannot be fully independent. Consider the following examples:

1. In both suras the calf is described as “a calf, a mere body that lowed” (Q 7.148 and Q 20.88).¹⁰⁰
2. Compare Q 7.150 (“And when Moses returned to his people, angry and sorrowful, he said . . .”) with Q 20.86 (“Then Moses returned to his people, angry and sorrowful, saying . . .”).¹⁰¹
3. Compare Moses’ interaction with his brother Aaron. In both suras Aaron begins his defense by addressing his brother as “son of my mother” (Q 7.150 and Q 20.94), no doubt a rhetorical ploy to rouse his brother’s compassion.
4. In both accounts there is a reference to Moses grabbing Aaron by the beard or the head (Q 7.150 and Q 20.94).¹⁰²

But one must also note the many differences between the two accounts.¹⁰³ Most dramatic is the figure of the Sāmīrī, who plays a crucial role in Q 20 as the force driving the sin, but is nowhere mentioned in Q 7. Whereas Q 7.148

¹⁰⁰ This phrase is discussed at some length in Pregill, “The Living Calf of Sinai,” 259–64.

¹⁰¹ In Q 7.150 there is no indication that Moses knew about the sin of his people before he returned. Q 20.86, on the other hand, follows a verse in which God informed Moses that his people had been led astray. How should we understand Q 7.150? Was Moses upset already when he started to return (since God had informed him of what happened without this being mentioned in the text) or did he only become troubled upon his arrival at the camp? See the discussion in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 15:9–10. In Exodus 32 there is tension exactly at this point. On the one hand, we are told in Exodus 32.7–8 that God informed Moses of the events while he was still on Mount Sinai. On the other hand, in Exodus 32.19 we read: “As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses’ anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.”

¹⁰² Another striking linguistic similarity between the two suras concerns the use of the root ‘-k-f together with the preposition ‘alā (Q 7.138, Q 20.91 and 97). This usage occurs only in these two suras. Compare other occurrences of the root with different prepositions or none: Q 2.125 (-), Q 2.185 (+ fī), Q 22.25 (+ fī), Q 21.52 (+ li), Q 26.71 (+ li), and Q 48.25 (+ an). Interestingly, in Q 7 the root occurs in what seems to be a separate episode, whereas in Q 20 it occurs in the calf story.

¹⁰³ The following are but a few examples: only Q 7 mentions the tablets which Moses received from God; only Q 7 mentions Moses’ request to see God as part of the story; only in Q 7 does Moses beg forgiveness for himself and for Aaron; only in Q 20 does Aaron warn the people not to sin and so on and so forth. At least some of these differences may be explained contextually.

attributes the making of the calf to the people of Moses (*qawm mūsā*), Q 20.89 attributes this same action to the Sāmirī. In Q 7 Moses reproaches only the people and Aaron, while in Q 20.95–7 he reproaches the Sāmirī as well and ends by cursing him.

Scholars have made many attempts at identifying the mysterious Sāmirī.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the issue of why this figure is mentioned in one account and not in the other is typically ignored. What are we to do with this difference? The harmonistic approach is most common among the classical exegetes. Al-Rāzī's comments on Q 7.148 are representative. He wonders why the verse attributes the forming of the calf to the people when we know (from Q 20) that it was in fact the work of the Sāmirī? Al-Rāzī offers two answers. The act is attributed to the group either since one of them did it or since they wished him to do so and were pleased with the result.¹⁰⁵

Interestingly, in his dissertation Michael Pregill offers a very different kind of harmonistic reading when he suggests, unconvincingly to my mind, that the Sāmirī is in fact another name for Aaron. One of his arguments is that the Sāmirī is never mentioned in Q 7, where we only read of Aaron.¹⁰⁶

Reading each account in its context suggests a different explanation. Q 7, which focuses on sinning groups, is content with having the Israelites carry the blame, whereas Q 20, which is more interested in sinning individuals, transfers it primarily to one evil character, the Sāmirī, perhaps with the additional aim of absolving the people (and Aaron), at least partially.¹⁰⁷ Thus in Q 7 the calf narrative appears as part of a list of sins of the Israelites. In verse 138 they are said to have asked Moses to make for them a god like those of the people that cling

¹⁰⁴ Recent discussions are found in Hawting, "Calf of Gold"; Rubin, "Traditions in Transformation," 202–3; and Pregill, "The Living Calf of Sinai," 155–92 and 230–58. The name has been explained as referring to Samael, a Samaritan, Shomron, Zimri (of Numbers 25), or a nickname of Aaron's. The participation of evil figures in the forming of an animate calf is a theme known from several rabbinic sources. For a survey and discussion of their relation to the Quranic presentation, see, for now, Pregill, "The Living Calf of Sinai," 84–92 and 268–94.

¹⁰⁵ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 15:6.

¹⁰⁶ Pregill, "The Living Calf of Sinai," 241–2.

¹⁰⁷ Note that in Q 7.150 the people are not granted an opportunity to respond to Moses' reproach, whereas in Q 20.87 they answer, shifting the blame to the Sāmirī. Note also that in Q 7.151 Moses begs mercy only for himself and Aaron, thus implying that the people as a whole are guilty and worthy of punishment (cf. Q 7.155–9). For the Jewish and Christian tendency to absolve Aaron, see, e.g., Hawting, "Calf of Gold," 275.

to idols.¹⁰⁸ Verses 146–7 seem to indicate that among Moses' people are found those who wax proud and ignore God's signs.¹⁰⁹ Later in verse 160 we are told that they wronged themselves. In verse 162 they are said to have "substituted a saying other than that which had been said to them." In verses 163–6 their transgression of the Sabbath is mentioned. In verse 167 we are told that they shall be punished until the day of the resurrection. Moreover, in Q 7 the sins of the Israelites follow a series of short accounts concerning sinning peoples and a general summary concerning the destruction of cities.¹¹⁰ Nowhere in these accounts is there mention of a figure who leads the collective astray.¹¹¹ In Q 20, on the other hand, there is more of an emphasis on sinning individuals.¹¹²

Having established that each account is to be interpreted in the context of its own sura, we now turn to the relationship between the two. The linguistic similarities strongly suggest that they must somehow be related. But how? As we have seen, Nöldeke and his followers place Q 20 in the second Meccan

¹⁰⁸ It is not clear to which incident the Quran is referring here. Whereas in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 335, this is linked with the Amaleq battle, in Paret, *Kommentar*, 172, passages such as Exodus 23.23f and 34.11–17 are suggested as the referent. Another alternative (put forth in Rubin, "Traditions in Transformation," 201) is the incident of Baal Peor (Numbers 25.3–5 and Psalms 106.28). In this incident we find a striking parallel to the Quranic language of cleaving to idols. Such an identification, however, is chronologically somewhat problematic. Interestingly, Ibn Jurayj claims that the said idols were in the shape of cattle and that these verses are the beginning of the calf account; see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 14:223. Compare Q 20.91 and 97, where similar language is used in the context of the calf narrative.

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted, however, that Neuwirth (see below) considers Q 7.145–7 to be a later Medinan interpolation. Her reasoning is somewhat problematic since she plainly assumes that v. 145 addresses Muhammad and his contemporaries, although it seems more plausible to read it as addressing Moses and his people. For *fa-khudhā bi-quwwatin*, compare Q 7.171, Q 2.63 and 93, as well as Q 19.12. The phrase *sa-urikum dāra l-fāsiqīna* is difficult, but it seems best understood as referring to Egypt or the land of the Canaanites. Compare Q 7.137 ("And We bequeathed upon the people that were abased all the east and the west of the land We had blessed...") and note the reading *sa-ūrithukum* or *sa-uwarrithukum* attributed to Ibn 'Abbās and Qasāma b. Zuhayr (al-Khaṭīb, *Mujam*, 3:157).

¹¹⁰ Q 7.59–64 (Noah's people), 65–72 (Ād), 73–9 (Thamūd), 80–4 (Lot's people), 85–93 (Madyan), and 94–102 (destruction of cities generally).

¹¹¹ A partial exception is the story of the conflict with Pharaoh (Q 7.103–36), but even Pharaoh is accompanied by a sinning *mala'* who egg him on. Moreover, these verses seem to emphasize the sins of Pharaoh's people as a group.

¹¹² Note that no *mala'* is mentioned alongside Pharaoh, who is described in v. 79 as having led his people astray (*wa-ādalla fir'awnu qawmahu*) just as the Sāmīri is said to have done in v. 85 (*wa-ādallahumu l-sāmīrī*).

period and Q 7 in the third Meccan period. The traditional Islamic lists, on the other hand, usually place Q 7 before Q 20.¹¹³ So who is right and which account came first? As with the example of the forbidden tree I will look for clues in the phrasing of the accounts and argue that Q 7 preserves at least in one detail the earlier version, whereas Q 20 reflects a secondary adaptation.¹¹⁴

The detail I have in mind is the mention of haste in both accounts. In Q 20.83–5 we read as follows:

(83) [God said:] “Now what has caused you, O Moses, to *leave* your people behind *in so great a haste (a'jalaka)?*” (84) He answered: “They are treading in my footsteps, while *I have hastened ('ajiltu)* unto You, O my Lord, so that You might be well pleased [with me].”(85) Said He: “Then [know

¹¹³ This presentation is somewhat schematic since both traditions, the classical and the Western one, also identify later Medinan interpolations to Q 7, but all seem to agree that the account of the calf incident itself stems from the Meccan period. In the classical tradition we find a few opinions according to which v. 163 alone or together with a few following verses (there are a few variants here; see, for now, Nagel, *Medinensische Einschübe*, 28–31) were revealed in Medina. Presumably, the ground is the command, “ask them,” which seems to suggest a conversation with Jews. In Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 1:159, this reasoning is rejected. It is, however, asserted that vv. 157–8 are Medinan. In Neuwirth, “‘Oral Scriptures’ in Contact,” the following verses are identified as later Medinan interpolations: Q 7.145–7 (see discussion above), 152–3, 155–7, and Q 20.80–2. The last instance requires a re-examination since these verses share some elements with the body of the story – the root *w-ṣ-d* and the incurring of wrath – whereas repentance plays a crucial role in the story of Adam later on in v. 122.

¹¹⁴ Other possible indications that the account in Q 20 is secondary in relation to Q 7 are inconclusive. Two may be mentioned here briefly: 1) In Q 20.93 Moses asks Aaron if he has disobeyed his commandment, although no such commandment was mentioned in this sura. This may be a reference to Q 7.142 (“and Moses said to his brother Aaron: ‘Act for me among my people, do right and do not follow the way of the workers of corruption’”), as indeed many exegetes note; see, e.g., Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 5:233. On the other hand, the command need not necessarily be spelled out as it is clear from context. 2) Aaron’s request in Q 20.94 (“seize me not by my beard, nor by my head”) seems to presuppose or respond to Q 7.150 (“and he seized his brother’s head, dragging him towards himself”). Indeed several exegetes note that something is missing in Q 20; see, e.g., al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 16:146. Might the point of Q 20 be to deny that Moses actually humiliated his brother in a fashion unfit for a prophet? Again, one could present the counterargument that Aaron’s response is sufficient enough an indication that Moses grabbed him by the head (as al-Tabarī argues).

that], verily, in your absence We have put your people to a test, and the Sāmirī has led them astray.”

Then follows Moses’ return to his people and his reproach of them for failing to keep their appointment with him (*fa-akhlafum maw’idī*, verse 86).¹¹⁵ What interests me in this passage is the twice-repeated mention of Moses’ haste. In these verses God seems to be criticizing Moses for leaving his people behind. To this Moses responds by saying that his people are not far away and that his haste was positively motivated.

Where does this dialogue originate from? In the Biblical accounts of the golden calf episode it is not mentioned. In fact, in Exodus 24.2 and 14 God tells Moses that the people shall not accompany him when he goes up to the Lord.¹¹⁶ Speyer speculated that the Quranic dialogue originated in a conflation with 1 Kings 19.¹¹⁷ Perhaps more to the point are the observations of Bodman and Paret. As Bodman notes, patience and haste are recurring themes in Q 20.¹¹⁸ According to Paret, the use of two verbs related to haste from the root

¹¹⁵ The people’s failure to keep their appointment stands at the center of the story in Q 20. The calf is presented as what prevented them from doing so. The meeting is set with the entire people in v. 80 (*wa-wā’adnākum jāniba l-tūri l-aymana*), but only Moses shows up. When rebuked he explains that the people are close behind (vv. 83–4), only to be told that they have been led astray (v. 85). In v. 86 Moses reproaches them for failing to keep the appointment (*fa-akhlafum maw’idī*). In v. 87 they explain why they did so (*akhlafnā maw’idaka*). The Sāmirī’s punishment in v. 97, appropriately, includes an appointment that God will not fail to keep (*wa-inna laka maw’idan lan tukhlaſahu*). Interestingly, the setting of an appointment to be kept occurs in another episode of the Moses narrative in Q 20.58–9. In Q 7, on the other hand, appointments are mentioned, but no emphasis is put on their being kept or not.

¹¹⁶ Noted in Rubin, *The Qur’ān*, 256.

¹¹⁷ Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 324. After Elijah flees to Mount Horeb we are told in 1 Kings 19 that:

“(9) At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (10) He answered: “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” (Similarly, vv. 13–14.)”

The tone of the passage is very different from what we find in the Quran. Whereas Elijah speaks of persecution, Moses says that his people are following his lead.

¹¹⁸ Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs*, 100–1. Most striking is Q 20.114, which uses the same verb (“and hasten not [*wa-lā ta’jal*] with the Quran . . .”).

'-j-l might be an intentional play on words on the main theme of this paragraph, the *'ijl* (“calf”) which the Israelites worshipped.¹¹⁹

Now, interestingly, in the parallel account in Q 7 we find a similar, but not identical, play on words with the same root, again noted tentatively by Paret.¹²⁰ We read in Q 7:150:

(150) When Moses returned to his people, angry and sorrowful, he said: “Very evil is the thing with which you have replaced me in my absence! *Did you hasten to leave behind the command of your Lord (a-'ajiltum amrabbikum)?*”

Here the wordplay on *'ijl* is not part of God’s reproach to Moses, but rather Moses’ reproach to his people for their behavior with the calf.

The exact meaning of the sentence translated as “Did you hasten to leave behind the command of your Lord?” is far from clear. The difficulty lies in two matters: the vagueness of the word *amr*¹²¹ and the unusual transitive use of *'ajila*.¹²² Some commentators interpret the sentence to mean “Have you anticipated the command of your Lord?” or “Have you left (the fulfilment of) the command of your Lord incomplete?”¹²³ Paret (following other exegetes) offers a very different understanding: “Wolltet ihr (denn) die Entscheidung eures Herrn übereilen?”, i.e., “Did you wish to rush your Lord’s *judgment?*” Paret finds support for his reading in the parallel speech of Moses in Q 20.86. Compare the two verses:

¹¹⁹ Paret, *Kommentar*, 335 (“Sollte etwa die Formulierung *a'jalaka* und [wa]-*'ajiltu* auf *'ijl* ['Kalb'] als das Stichwort des ganzen Abschnitts hinweisen, bzw. in einer Art Wortspiel darauf vorbereiten?”). Though the traditional works devoted to rhetorical aspects of the Quran were very much interested in such wordplay (referred to as *jinās* or *tajnīs*), they do not seem to have noted this instance. The reason most probably being that the verbs and the noun are not in the same sentence. For an overview of this rhetorical feature, see Heinrichs, “Tadjnīs.” For wordplay in the Quran, see Rippin, “The Poetics of Qur’ānic Punning.” There too the calf example remains unmentioned.

¹²⁰ Paret, *Kommentar*, 175: “Mit dem Ausdruck *a-'ajiltum* soll vielleicht auf das Kalb ['ijl] angespilt werden.” In this instance, Paret was preceded by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, who, in a note to his translation, noted the play on words (Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur-an*, 1:385, note 1115). Misled by the wordplay, Ben-Shemesh renders this phrase into Hebrew as **הַפְכָתָם לְעֵגֶל** **אֲתָה דִּבֶּר רַبּוֹנָךְ** (“you turned the word of your Lord into a calf”); Ben-Shemesh, *The Holy Qur'an Translated into Hebrew*, 99.

¹²¹ See Paret, *Kommentar*, 175.

¹²² See, e.g., al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:511.

¹²³ See ibid., and Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:1964.

Q 20.86

Q 7.150

فَرَجَعَ مُوسَىٰ إِلَى قَوْمِهِ عَصْبَانَ أَسْفًا
 قَالَ يَا قَوْمَ اللَّهِ يَعْدُكُمْ بِرِبِّكُمْ وَعَدًّا حَسَنًا
 أَفَطَالَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْعَهْدُ
 أَمْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ يَحْلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبٌ مِّنْ
 رَبِّكُمْ فَأَخْلَقْتُمْ مَوْعِدِي

وَلَمَّا رَاجَعَ مُوسَىٰ إِلَى قَوْمِهِ عَصْبَانَ أَسْفًا
 قَالَ يٰبْنَ سَمَّا حَفَّتُمُونِي مِنْ بَعْدِي أَعْلَمُ
 أَمْرَ رَبِّكُمْ

(وَالْقَى الْأَلَوَاحَ وَأَخَذَ بِرَأْسِ أَخِيهِ يَجْرِهُ
 إِلَيْهِ قَالَ ابْنَ أَمَّ إِنَّ الْقَوْمَ اسْتَضْعَفُونِي
 وَكَادُوا يَقْتُلُونِي فَلَا تُشْمِثُ بِي الْأَعْدَاءَ
 وَلَا تَجْعَلِنِي مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ)

Whereas Moses' question in Q 7 is short, it is much more elaborate in Q 20, containing three clauses. In the last clause he asks: "or did you desire that anger should alight on you from your Lord?", which could be taken as the equivalent of Paret's "Did you wish to rush your Lord's judgment?"¹²⁴

Though Paret's reading is not without merit, a comparison with the Biblical account of the calf may allow us to decide against it.¹²⁵ Unlike the wordplay in Q 20, the one in Q 7 does have a close parallel in the Biblical account of the calf episode, especially as transmitted in Syriac. According to Exodus 32.8,

124 Paret, *Kommentar*, 175, cites another verse in support of his interpretation. In Q 16.1 the audience is warned not to seek to hasten (*fa-lā tasta'jilūhu*) the judgment of God (*amr Allāh*). As Paret notes, a different form of the verb is used here.

125 Q 20 may have interpreted Q 7 as referring to the seeking of punishment, but this is not necessarily what Q 7 intended. Q 20 does two things it removes the verb 'ajila to a different part of the story and replaces it with a reference to the seeking of punishment.

Interestingly, the second question in Q 20.86 (أَفَطَالَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْعَهْدُ) could also be taken as an interpretation of Q 7.150. This question could refer to the length of Moses' absence ("was the time [of absence] too long for you?") or to God's long-lasting kindness to them that led them to sin (compare Q 57.16). One could also argue, though this is less likely in my opinion, that this question refers to the people's impatience with the end of days and their demand that it come immediately. Though this theme is common in the Quran, it does not fit the context here.

God informs Moses that “they have been *quick to turn* aside from the way that I *commanded* them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf...” In the Hebrew there is no play on words here, at least not explicitly. The word for quick is *maher*, whereas the word for calf is *‘egel*. In the Syriac, however, quick is *ba-‘gal* and the calf is *‘eglā*. Likewise, we read in the parallel account in Deuteronomy 9.12: “Then the Lord said to me: ‘Get up, go down *quickly* from here, for your people whom you have brought from Egypt have acted corruptly. They have been *quick to turn from* the way that I *commanded* them; they have cast an image for themselves.’” And again in Deuteronomy 9.16, where we find Moses reprimanding the people, saying: “Then I saw that you had indeed sinned against the Lord your God, by casting for yourselves an image of a *calf*; you had been *quick to turn from* the way that the Lord had *commanded* you.” Again the play on words is found only in the Syriac, not in the Hebrew or Jewish Aramaic for that matter.¹²⁶

The Biblical parallels (especially from Deuteronomy 9.16) allow us to make two observations. First, Q 7.150 should probably be understood as meaning something like “Have you quickly left (the fulfillment of) the command of your Lord?”¹²⁷ Second, the wordplay in Q 7.150 is almost identical to what we find in the Syriac Bible, whereas the wordplay in Q 20 is not.

How are we to understand this last point? Should we imagine that Q 20, independently of the Biblical account, made a play on words on *ijl* and later Q 7 modified it to fit the Biblical account? The opposite scenario seems more likely, i.e., that Q 7 reproduced a pun known from the Syriac tradition and that later Q 20 further developed this pun in a new direction not found in the Biblical account.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ That the wordplay is intentional in the Peshitta and not simply a natural result of the translation into Syriac is suggested by the consistent choice of *ba-‘gal* over *estarhab* or *sarheb* (cf. Genesis 18.6–7, where the Peshitta alternates). See also the Peshitta to Psalms 106.12, where *estarhab* is used since the verse is removed from the calf incident (vv. 19–20).

¹²⁷ Admittedly, had the verse read أَعْجَلْتُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّكُمْ، my interpretation would have been smoother (see Q 20.83). Such a variant is, however, unattested. Nonetheless, compare al-Zamakhsharī (cited above) and al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 10:451, where the verse is glossed as meaning: أَسْبَقْتُمْ أَمْرَ رَبِّكُمْ فِي أَنفُسِكُمْ وَذَهَبْتُمْ عَنْهُ. Al-Ṭabarī notes that one says لَا تَنْهَبْ عَنِي وَتَدْعُنِي لا تَعْجَلْنِي يَا فَلَانْ when one means “Do not go away from me and leave me.” It should be noted that, whereas in the Bible the haste and the turning away are expressed with two separate words, in the Quran, according to my reading, one word conveys both notions.

¹²⁸ Alternatively, Moses’ haste to meet God in Q 20 might have developed from Deuteronomy 9.12, where Moses was ordered to descend from the mountain quickly. Perhaps some pre-

Thus it would seem that in this instance as well Q 7 preserves an element in a more original form than Q 20 does. The comparison of the passages should again remind us that the chronology offered by Nöldeke and his school should not be understood rigidly and that there is more to be done in establishing the relationship between specific Quranic passages.

4 Conclusions

In his inspiring book, Nicolai Sinai emphasizes the complementary nature of the relationship between parallel accounts.¹²⁹ This observation is often valid, but it only tells part of the story. In other instances there is real tension between the various versions. Did Satan entice Adam with a promise of dominion or the chance of becoming an angel? Was the calf created by the Sāmirī or by the people of Moses? The answer depends on which account we read.

The tension between parallel accounts raises several interesting questions. First, how does this slightly messy situation I have been trying to portray here fit with what the Quran tells us about itself? Do the self-referential statements of the Quran reflect in any way the kinds of tension this paper has highlighted?

At first glance the answer would seem to be a resounding “no.” Consider Q 4.82: “What, do they not ponder the Quran? If it had been from other than God surely they would have found in it much inconsistency (*ikhtilāfan kathīran*).”¹³⁰ Moreover, Sinai draws attention to one verse which supports his complementary model. In Q 39.23 God is said to have sent down the Quran as “a book, *consistent (mutashābih) in its oft-repeated parts*.” Sinai notes that

Islamic retelling of the story reasoned that if he left in haste he might also have come in haste. Were this to be the case, my argument concerning the primacy of Q 7 would be refuted. So far, however, I have not found such a source and think it more likely that the theme of Moses’ haste in Q 20 reflects a reworking of the tradition preserved in Q 7. In favor of my argument I adduce the linguistic similarity between the two passages as well as the first example examined in this essay.

¹²⁹ Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 81–5.

¹³⁰ One could argue that the verse denies only “*much* inconsistency,” thus allowing some degree of inconsistency. It is not clear, however, that the emphasis is on “*much (kathīran)*.” It may be no more than a word that supplies the end rhyme to the verse. According to the exegetes cited in Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 10:196–7, the said consistency refers to the Quran’s accuracy in describing the secret acts of the hypocrites (see Q 4.81), to its high stylistic level, or to its content. Regarding the last option, al-Rāzī raises the objection that the Quran does indeed contain contradictory verses only to reject it by stating that these verses are only seemingly contradictory.

repetition is treated here as a positive feature of the Quran. Clearly, argues Sinai, this can only be true if the Quran is following a complementary model.¹³¹

So must this mean that no tensions are to be found between parallel versions? To my mind not at all. Even if we accept Sinai's reading, which is not beyond dispute, we should be careful to distinguish between what the text tells us it is doing and what it actually does; the two are not necessarily identical. One could imagine that complete consistency is the ideal aspired to but not always achieved. The aspiration may itself be reflected in such instances in which a later sura seems to try to harmonize the tension between two earlier suras.¹³²

Moreover, the term *mutashābih* occurs not only in the verse cited by Sinai. It occurs also in a well-known self-referential verse: Q 3.7. There, however, we surprisingly read that the verses known as the *mutashābihāt* are not a source of pride, but rather a somewhat problematic matter: "As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow *mā tashābaha minhu*, desiring dissension." Commonly rendered as "ambiguous," this is by no means the only possible understanding of the term. An examination of the other occurrences of *tashābaha* in the Quran suggests that its basic meaning is "to resemble one another," at times to the point of being confusing.¹³³

Among the several interpretations offered for this verse one also reads that what the dissenters focus on are repeating accounts with small variations. To quote but one example, al-Ṭabarī explains the term as meaning verses which are worded similarly yet carry a different meaning (*mutashābihāt fī l-tilāwa mukhtalifāt fī l-ma'na*).¹³⁴ It is tempting to adopt an interpretation similar to that of al-Ṭabarī's and to argue that Q 3.7 is meant as a defense against the

¹³¹ Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 82.

¹³² Adam's expulsion from Paradise as portrayed in Q 2 may be such an instance. See the discussion above. I hope to examine this phenomenon in greater detail elsewhere.

¹³³ Studies of Q 3.7 include, among others, Kinberg, "*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashābihāt*"; Syamsuddin, "*Muḥkam* and *Mutashābih*"; Wild, "The Self-Referentiality of the Qur'an"; and Sinai, "Qur'anic Self-Referentiality."

¹³⁴ See also the interpretation of Ibn Zayd, who adduces the following examples of *mutashābihāt* which consist of variations in phraseology with little if any difference in meaning: 1) Q 11.40 where Noah is ordered to load the ark (*iḥmil fihā*) with the various species and Q 23.27 where he is commanded to place them (*fa-sluk fihā*) in the ark; 2) Q 28.32 where Moses is commanded to put his hand into his bosom (*usluk yadaka*) and Q 27.12 where the same command is expressed with the words *wa-adkhil yadaka*; 3) Q 20.20 where Moses' staff becomes a swiftly moving snake (*hayya tas'ā*) and Q 7.107 where it becomes a manifest serpent (*thu'bān mubīn*); Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 5:192 and 197–8.

accusations of opponents who criticized the varying (and at times contradictory) repetitions of the Quran.¹³⁵ This would suggest that the Quran itself acknowledges the problem.

But even if Q 3.7 should be understood differently, one wonders about the Quran's notion of consistency. Is it possible that what is consistent is the overall Quranic message not the small narrative details which are viewed not as history, but rather as a tool for driving home a point?

The question of how to understand the emergence of such variants requires more work before one can decide which model or rather models are correct. Do we have here the product of one author who was either unaware of the problems his various retellings created or simply thought them immaterial (as Khalafallāh would argue)? Do we have here several hands at work (as Pohlmann would have it)? Are the variations indicative of oral or written transmission?

I have my own thoughts on these issues, but one of the points I have attempted to make here is that the intra-Quranic parallels demand systematic work and should be examined independently of general notions as to how the Quran evolved, which may or may not be accurate. Moreover, I would argue for a partial synthesis of different approaches, rather than arbitrary exclusion.¹³⁶ In both examples discussed here contextual and diachronic readings supplement each other.

Another point that I hope I have stressed sufficiently concerns the contribution of the pre-Islamic sources to understanding the relationship between the intra-Quranic parallels. In both examples (the forbidden tree and the haste in the calf story) an element known from pre-Islamic tradition is reproduced more or less faithfully in one Quranic account, but assumes a new life in another. These instances in which we can track the drifting elements are telling and suggest an explanation for other Quranic departures from earlier Biblical traditions.¹³⁷

Finally, a remark concerning relative chronology. Whereas Neuwirth and Sinai place Q 20 before Q 7 in their chronological scheme, in my examples the versions preserved in Q 7 seem older. Does this mean that we should change the scheme by replacing the relative order of both suras? Or does it mean that

¹³⁵ It is interesting to note the continuity of this critique of the Quran from the days of the Prophet, or at least those of the classical exegetes, to contemporary polemical websites.

¹³⁶ See the comments regarding the Bible in Nahkola, *Double Narratives in the Old Testament*, 4 and 193.

¹³⁷ It is worth repeating that in other instances the movement may very well be in the opposite direction, i.e., towards greater conformity with Biblical and post-Biblical traditions, as several scholars have argued. Each example needs to be studied separately.

the relationship between the two suras does not fit into a neat linear model? A serious answer to such questions requires a systematic analysis of both suras in their entirety. I hope to supply that elsewhere.

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CHAPTER 2

The Earliest Attestation of the *Dhimma* of God and His Messenger and the Rediscovery of P. Nessana 77 (60s AH/680 CE)

Robert Hoyland¹

with an Appendix by Hannah Cotton

Excavations in the village of Nessana, in southern Israel/Palestine, by the American Colt Expedition in the 1930s brought to light a corpus of papyri that comprise almost 200 documents as well as a number of literary and theological items. They were found in two caches in two separate churches, that of the Theotokos in the south of the village and that of Saints Sergius and Bacchus to the north. The texts span the sixth and seventh centuries and so are able to reveal to us aspects of the life of this community both before and after the Arab conquests. There are about 40 papyri pertaining to the Islamic period, dealing with taxation, compulsory service, farming, provisioning of the army, and personal matters. One of the papyri, numbered 77, was mislaid and so was not transported to America with the rest of the corpus. The Greek text (Fig. 2.1) on one side of it was published on the basis of a photograph, but the Arabic text (Fig. 2.2) that was on the other side was not published, though the editors do not explain why.² Presumably it made its way to the Rockefeller Museum, where most ancient artifacts were stored at that time, and there slumbered in obscurity until it was rediscovered by Professor Hannah Cotton in the course of a cataloging exercise (see appendix below). The Arabic text comprises two letters, the significance of which I shall first discuss before proceeding to present their edition and translation.

¹ I dedicate this paper affectionately to Patricia whose enthusiastic and inspired teaching was what first drew me to the field of Islamic history. I am very grateful to Hannah Cotton, Werner Diem, Geoffrey Khan, Marie Legendre, Lucian Reinfandt, Irfan Shahid, Petra Sijpesteijn, and Khalid Younes, who have discussed this papyrus with me and offered helpful comments.

² *Excavations at Nessana*, 3.222–5, though in the section on P. Nessana 56 there is a brief allusion to the contents of the Arabic part of P. Nessana 77, principally because Yazid ibn Fā'īd features in both texts (*ibid.*, 159).

The Relationship and Nature of the Arabic and Greek Texts

As noted above, there is writing on both sides of this papyrus, in Greek on one side and in Arabic on the other. The Greek side records tax payments made by a number of Nessana residents and it has no connection at all with the content of the Arabic side, which comprises correspondence between a superior official and some of his subordinates. The Arabic texts are written across/perpendicular to the fibers of the papyrus, which had become the prevailing practice for letters since at least the sixth century,³ whereas the Greek text is written along/parallel to the fibers. This on its own would seem to indicate that the Arabic precedes the Greek, but it is worth also considering the nature of the texts.

The presence of *two* letters on the Arabic side and the lack of any address suggest that they were not actually sent.⁴ Probably they were copies of the originals (which had been sent) kept for some legal or administrative purpose.⁵ Yazid ibn Fā'id was a government agent with some sort of authority (probably fiscal) over Nessana and so it is not surprising that correspondence involving him might be copied and kept at Nessana, especially as one of the letters made clear that the Nessanites were protected against despoliation by such agents.⁶ The Greek text is of purely local interest – an informal record of tax payments of some Nessana residents – and so it is possible that it was written on the back of the Arabic text when the latter had lost its importance. There are in fact a number of papyri which follow this pattern; that is, a formal text written across the fibers and on the other side a less formal set of accounts written along the

³ Fournet, "Esquisse," esp. 29–31; Grob, *Documentary Arabic*, 173 (but also see p. 175 regarding "other formats"). It is the prevalent practice in the Islamic-period Nessana papyri – thus in P. Nessana 55–76 the writing is always across the fibers.

⁴ Gonis, "Fiscal Documents," 198, gives the example of documents that contain *entagia* (tax demands) "written consecutively on the same sheet of papyrus, but not cut up, which implies that the *entagia* were probably never dispatched." However, Khan, *Arabic Papyri*, 99–102, publishes a papyrus that bears two quittances from the same person and appears to understand that it was sent (my thanks to Marie Legendre for this reference).

⁵ This may explain the omission of *anmā ba'du* in the first letter, which is a fundamental epistolary formula, and the first name of Ibn Ḥusayn in the second letter; they were presumably omitted by mistake, but in a copy it would not be crucial to correct it.

⁶ It is the same sender in both letters, so one might argue that they belong to his archive, but since he was most likely the governor in Gaza (or at least at some official headquarters of the Muslim regime) it is hard to see how a papyrus from his archive would then have ended up in Nessana, which was not a Muslim administrative center at this time.

fibers.⁷ Examples of this are to be found in P. Nessana 31 (a contract) / 37 (an inventory of camels), 112 (a contract) / 78 (a list of names and amounts), 74 (a letter) / 81 (a list of names and payments in kind), and 70 (a letter) / 80 (a list of names and donations to the church). In these particular cases it is clearly the letter or contract that is written first, since it is an original document, and then it was reused for the various lists. It seems reasonable to argue that the same situation obtains in the case of P. Nessana 77. However, the fact that the letters of this papyrus are not originals means that this argument is not conclusive.

One of the people mentioned in the tax list of P. Nessana 77 is Sergius son of George son of Patrick, who was abbot of Nessana's monastery in the 680s or head of one of its churches. In fact, his family had served in this position for at least four generations, celibacy not being much observed by the clergy in non-urban areas of the Roman Empire. In this capacity (*hegoumenos*) they seem to have had a connection with the church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, where the archive to which P. Nessana 77 belonged was found. This might help explain why this papyrus remained at this church, reused for the tax list in which Sergius features and so was retained in his family archive.

The Arabic Script

In the Nessana archive are a group of bilingual Greek–Arabic *entagia* (tax demand notes) from the 670s, the Arabic script of which is much the same as that of P. Nessana 77. The attention of the renowned Austrian papyrologist Adolf Grohmann was drawn to these *entagia* “owing to a shorter, more vigorous and thicker handwriting” than was the norm for “the writing of the 1st century of the Hijra.”⁸ It exhibits a number of features of what is known as the Ḥijāzī script, which is considered the earliest distinctive style of Arabic handwriting in the Islamic period. It is characterized by “elongated ligatures between letters and long spaces between freestanding letters. Individual letter shapes are cursive and the writing is generally large with letters extending high while slanting.”⁹ The most well-known trait of this script, because it was

⁷ This practice is known as opistography, on which see Grob, *Documentary Arabic*, 183–5. But there is at least one case where the reverse is true: P. Nessana 30, an inheritance declaration (dated 13 September 596 CE), is written along the fibers whereas the accounts on the back (P. Nessana 79) are written across them.

⁸ Grohmann, *World*, 73.

⁹ Sijpesteijn, “Palaeography,” 517. For interesting discussion of the development of cursive features in early Arabic writing see Grob, *Documentary Arabic*, 159–65.

highlighted by the tenth-century Muslim bibliophile Ibn al-Nadīm, is the shape of the *alif*, extending high and leaning to the right. This is true of a number of the *alifs* in P. Nessana 77, though there are also some that are quite upright. One encounters a similar variation in the shape of final *yā'*: its tail sometimes drops directly downwards and sometimes goes horizontally backwards below the preceding letters.¹⁰ Otherwise, the letter shapes tend to be consistent and regular. One might also note that dots to distinguish letters of the same form are more frequent than is the norm in early Arabic documents.¹¹

Date

There are several indications of the date of this papyrus, all of which suggest an approximate time of writing of the late 680s. Firstly, a number of the persons mentioned in the Greek tax list feature in other Nessana papyri of the 680s.¹² Secondly, the Yazīd ibn Fā'id who features in both of the Arabic letters of P. Nessana 77 also appears in P. Nessana 56, which is exactly dated to 18 January 687 (day 3 of the month of Peritios, indiction 15, year *fpa* of Elusa / year 67). Thirdly, none of the Nessana papyri is dated or manifestly dateable later than the year 70 AH/690 CE, which would seem to be the *terminus ante quem* for the whole collection. Finally, both the Arabic and the Greek handwriting of P. Nessana 77 are consistent with a date in the second half of the seventh century.¹³

The Cast

Two persons feature in both of the Arabic letters: Bayyān ibn Qays and Yazīd ibn Fā'id. Unfortunately, neither is mentioned in Muslim sources. Bayyān is the

¹⁰ Both forms already exist in the late Nabataean Aramaic script, out of which the Arabic script evolves (Nehmé, "Glimpse," 51 and fig. 2).

¹¹ For some interesting comments on this matter see Kaplony, "Dots."

¹² *Excavations at Nessana*, 3.222, lists the names in the Greek tax list of P. Nessana 77 that also occur in P. Nessana 56 (dated 687), 57 (dated 689), 58, 76, 80, and 81.

¹³ On the Greek script, note the comment of Kraemer: "the account is carefully drawn in a small neat hand characteristic of certain of the late seventh-century clerks" (*Excavations at Nessana*, 3.222). As regards the Arabic script, the obvious thing to note is its similarity to P. Nessana 56 (dated explicitly to 687) and 61–7 (dated explicitly to 674–89). The shape of medial *hā'* (with a vertical stroke rising above the rest of the letter) is quite archaic and develops out of the Nabataean Aramaic form of this letter (Nehmé, "Glimpse," 50).

sender and he is issuing a rebuke in the first letter and giving a command in the second, so he is the higher authority. Other official letters of the Nessana corpus from the Islamic period hail from the governor in Gaza and it is quite possible that this is the office that Bayyān holds.¹⁴ Yazīd ibn Fā'id is only mentioned tangentially in the first letter, where he appears as one of a group of at least two persons who have acted wrongfully, in the view of Bayyān, towards the people of Nessana, who enjoy, Bayyān emphasizes, “the protection of God and of His messenger.” Kraemer argued from this reference that Yazīd was the judge (*qādi*) of Nessana,¹⁵ but the second letter, which is directly addressed to Yazīd, seems to concern the collection of taxes from a particular village and so Yazīd is more likely an example of that group designated *'ummāl* in our documentary sources; that is, financial agents of the Muslim polity. Nothing is known about the other three characters who are named in these two letters: Yazīd ibn al-Aswad, ‘Ubayd Allāh and Ibn Ḥusayn (perhaps the same person: see below), though the first is mentioned in P. Nessana 86, which is a fragment of an account written in Greek (the name appears as *eizēd ben alasouad*).

The Term *dhimmat Allāh wa-dhimmat rasūlihi*

P. Nessana 77 earns the distinction of being the earliest documentary text to include mention of the word *dhimma*. The term already occurs in the Qur'ān, although only twice, both times in the same chapter and in the same set phrase: “They (the polytheists) do not observe with regard to you (9.8)/with regard to a believer (9.10) either *ill* or *dhimma*.” It also occurs in some surrender agreements preserved in later literary works, but again only rarely and generally only in the case of settlements in the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁶ Qur'ān commentators offer various explanations for its meaning in Sura 9, but by far the

¹⁴ P. Nessana 60–6 (dated to 674–7): al-Ḥārith ibn ‘Abd; P. Nessana 67 (dated to 689): Ḥassān ibn Mālik; P. Nessana 72–3 (dated to induction 12, most probably 683–4): Abū Rāshid.

¹⁵ In the course of the edition of P. Nessana 56, where Yazīd ibn Fā'id acts as one of the witnesses to a release from labor document.

¹⁶ E.g., Ibn Zanjawayh, *Amwāl*, 2:447 (Najrān); Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, 2:671 (Khaybar – the *dhimma* is voided if the Khaybaris conceal anything from the prophet); Balādhurī, *Futūh*, 60 (Jews of Maqna). Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, 33–6, mentions it in her chapter on the seventh-century surrender agreements, but notes that the Muslims were influenced by prevailing practice once in the Levant and abandoned Arabian terms like *dhimma* and *jīwār* in favor of the term *amān*. The so-called Constitution of Medina drafted by Muhammad states that “the protection of God is one” (*dhimmat Allāh wāḥida*) without clarification (most recently, see Arjomand, “Constitution of Medina,” 562, his article 7).

most common is that the doublet of *ill* and *dhimma* refers to consanguinity (*qarāba*) and covenant (*mīthāq* or *'ahd*),¹⁷ in particular a covenant that guarantees protection.¹⁸

Muslims enjoyed this covenant automatically, as is evident from such popular sayings as: "Whoever prays like us, eats our sacrifices, and adopts our direction of prayer has the *dhimma* of God and the *dhimma* of His messenger."¹⁹ It could, however, be forfeited, and Muslim lawyers envisaged a number of scenarios that led to loss of God's *dhimma*, such as deliberately neglecting to pray and "aiding a liar to deny the truth."²⁰ In some cases it is ambiguous whether Muslims or non-Muslims are intended, or quite possibly both are meant. The latter is likely in the case of a slave who flees to enemy territory and thereby forfeits the protection of God and His messenger.²¹ Sometimes, however, it is made explicit that non-Muslims are being spoken of and it is evident that they too can be in receipt of God's *dhimma*. Thus, it is occasionally stated expressly that paying poll tax earns non-Muslims this same protection.²² And the jurist al-Shāfi'i (d. 828) states that any Muslim authority seeking to write a *jizya* treaty for non-Muslims should always include a clause specifying that "the protection of God and His messenger" will be removed from whosoever speaks ill against Islam.²³ Moreover, we have the testimony of P. Nessana 77 that just such protection was accorded to the people of Nessana, whom we know from the rest of the Nessana corpus to be largely, if not wholly, Christian at this time. The

¹⁷ Already in Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 2:158. However, some scholars, like 'Abd al-Razzāq, decided to read them as synonyms: *al-ill: al-hilf wa-l-dhimma: al-'ahd* (*Tafsīr*, 2:137). And a few read the first component as a reference to God, as in Jibr-il (i.e., El as in Gabri'el), taking the whole phrase to mean that the unbelievers did not pay regard to God or His covenant (*Tabarī, Tafsīr*, 14:146–7).

¹⁸ As such Fattal, *Statut légal*, 75, took it to be a translation of *fides*.

¹⁹ Bukhārī, *Sahīh*, 1:87 (*bāb faḍl istiqbāl al-qibla*); Balādhurī, *Futūh*, 69; cf. Ibn Zanjawayh, *Amwāl*, 1:125.

²⁰ 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 3:124, and Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 6:171 (omitting to pray). Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh*, 15:315, 53:256; Suyūṭī, *Durr*, 7.273 (liar re Q 40.5). Abū Ya'lā decided that abandoning the Ramadan fast or prayer or the profession of faith would lose one God's *dhimma* (quoted by Suyūṭī, *Durr*, 1:712 re Q 2.238). See Ayoub, "Dhimmah," for more discussion.

²¹ Ḥumaydī, *Musnad*, 2:51 (no. 856); cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 6:451, who just says *al-dhimma* and not *dhimmat Allāh*.

²² Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 2:589 (*man addā dhālikā [al-jizya] ilā rasūl Allāh fa-inna lahu dhammat Allāh wa-dhimmat rasūlihi*) – in Muhammad's letter to the lords of Ḥimyar, repeated in Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, 3:121 and 129.

²³ Shāfi'i, *Umm*, 4:209.

dhimma of God and His messenger would appear, therefore, to be available to all in the early decades of Muslim rule.

It did not remain that way for long, however. Increasingly, the *dhimma* of God and His messenger came to be seen as something that was only meant for Muslims, and a lower level protection, afforded by rank-and-file Muslims, was deemed sufficient for non-Muslims. This is made clear in a very widely circulating saying: “If you are besieging the people of a fortified place and they want you to grant them the *dhimma* of God and the *dhimma* of His prophet, do not do so, but grant them the *dhimma* of you and your fathers and your companions.”²⁴ And thus in classical Islamic law the term *dhimma* is used for “the obligation of Muslims in general, and of Muslim rulers in particular, to grant protection to non-Muslims living under their rule,”²⁵ and in this way *ahl al-dhimma* becomes a term used to designate non-Muslims living under the protection of Muslims.²⁶

Edition of the Text

Color: light brown

Measurements: 50 × 33 cm

Preservation: reasonable, though there are a number of lacunae, especially on the right-hand side.²⁷

(Letter 1)

بسم [الله] الرحمن الرحيم	1
[من ين بن] قيس الى يزيد بن الاسود وعيid اللـ[هـ] بن [..]	2

²⁴ Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:219; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 6:511; Ibn Zanjawayh, *Amwāl*, 1:122; Muslim, *Šahīh*, 3:1357 (*bāb ta'mīr al-imām al-umarā'*); Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, 2:757; Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, 4:187. The reason adduced is that “it is better for you to violate your own *dhimma* than to violate the *dhimma* of God and of His messenger.”

²⁵ See Friedmann, “Dhimma,” *Er*³, where he sums up the classical position on this term.

²⁶ The term *ahl al-dhimma* first appears in papyri in the year 793–4 (Grohmann, *World*, 132–3 = *PERF* 624, lines 6–7: “to all the Muslims and *ahl al-dhimma* who [live] in the *kūra* of Ahnas”).

²⁷ Lacunae are indicated in the edition and translation by means of square brackets. Where the missing letters/words are clear from the sense or from conventional usage I supply them. Where it is possible to estimate the number of letters missing, I indicate this by the use of dots; where this is not possible, I leave the space between the brackets blank.

س[لم] عـ[ليكم فاني احمد اليك الله الذى] لا اله الا هو 3
 [ان] الله لا يحب الظلم ولا الفساد وانكم لا 4
 دعوتكـم الى امر تأمون فيه وتنظموا [...] 5
 ذلك الذى تندموا وتوجعوا فيها [...] لكم 6
] 7

و [] غالبة فانه بيس الراي رايت ان 8
 [] و تأخذوا ثمنها واني قد 9

[] .ا. . و فان يزيد بن فايد ليس له 10
 [] له دفع وان لاهل نصان ذمة الله 11
 وذمة ر[سـ]وله فلا تخسروا ان نقر لكم فيها 12
 لفساد ولا الظلم فاذ جاتكم كتبى هذا فا [...] 13
 التي انا [] فوالله لا [] ان منها 14
 [...] اظلما الا تسلفته من امولكم حتا انتم ان 15
 [يـ]جرـ[زى] من يفعل ذلك منكم في ماله فاعلم ذلك 16
 [...] الله []حسـان ولا يغرنـك وينـ[بغـ]ى بين فـ[ذـ]ين اما 17
 [] [و] الـ[سـلـ]م عليكم ورحمـت الله 18

(Letter 2)

[بـ]سـ[م الله الرحمن الرحيم] 19
 [مـ]ن يـ[ن] بن قـ[يس] الى يـ[زـ]يد بن فـ[اـيد] سـ[لم] عـ[ليـك] فـ[انـي] اـ[حـمـدـ] 20
 [إـ]لـ[يـك] الله الذى لا اله الا هو اـ[مـ]ا بعد فـ[انـي] ماـ[كـنـتـ] 21
 [إـ]عـ[رـ]فـ ان يـ[غـلـبـ]كـ بن حـ[سـيـنـ] عـ[لـيـقـيـةـ] اـ[نـتـ] عـ[لـيـهـ] فـ[انـ] 22
 [إـ]ا عـ[لـيـهـ] فـ[ذـ]لكـ والا فـ[اـذـنـ] بـ[عـثـ] عـ[لـيـهـ] 23
 [مـ]ن يـ[كـفيـهـ] وـ[الـسـلـ]م عـ[لـيـكـ] وـ[رـحـمـتـ اللهـ] 24

Translation

(Letter 1)

1. In the name [of God] the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. From [Bayyān ibn] Qays to Yazid ibn al-Aswad and 'Ubayd All[āh] ibn [...]
3. Pea[ce] upo[n you. I praise for you God beside Whom] there is no other god.
4. God does not like wrongdoing or corruption and as regards you, I did not
5. appoint you to a job for you to act sinfully and behave unjustly in it [...]
6. That which you will be sorry for and will suffer for is [... to you].
7. []
8. and [] taking possession. Indeed your way of thinking is despicable, (namely) that
9. [] and you take the (financial) worth of it, even though I have
10. [], for as regards Yazid ibn Fā'id there is not due to him
11. [] due to him payment, and the people of Nessana have the protection of God
12. and the protection of His mess[eng]er. So do not reckon that we acquiesce to your
13. corruption and injustice in respect of it. When this letter of mine reaches you, then [...]
14. what I [], and by God do not [] from it
15. [...] unjustly or else I will take it in advance from your assets until such time as I am satisfied that
16. whoever of you is doing that [will be p]enal[ized] in respect of his wealth. So take note of that!
17. May God [...] goodness and not lead you astray. It is incumbent (on you to choose) between two separate things: either
18. [] Peace be upon you and the mercy of God.

(Letter 2)

19. [In the n]ame of God the Merciful, the Compassionate.
20. [Fr]om Bayyān ibn Qays to Yazid ibn Fā'id. Peace be upon you and I praise
21. for you God beside whom there is no other god. Further: I was not
22. awa[re] that Ibn Ḥusayn was wresting from you a village that you are (supposedly) in charge of. So if
23. [] off him, then that is fine; otherwise, let us dispatch to it
24. someone who can take full charge of it. Peace upon you and the mercy of God.

Commentary

(Letter 1)

Line 2: This line gives the names of the sender and the addressees. The former appears at the head of both letters, only partially in the first, but more fully in the second (see line 20). Kraemer gives it as Nabr ibn Qays,²⁸ but the last letter of the first name has too long of a tail for a *rā'*; it must rather be a *nūn*. Since there are two teeth before it, both without dots, this yields a number of permutations, of which the most likely is perhaps Bayyān (medial *alif* is not usually written in early Arabic documents). There is a slight gap after the initial 'ayn of the name of the second addressee and, if one takes this to be intentional, one could read 'Abd rather than 'Ubayd.

Line 3: This line is mostly missing, but enough is visible to reconstruct the standard phrase that comes after the names of the sender and addressee(s) in letters in this period, namely: *sal(ā)m 'alaykum fa-innī aḥmadu ilaykum Allāh alladhī lā ilāha illā huwa*.²⁹ One would also expect the phrase *ammā ba'd* (see commentary for line 21 and note 12 below), but there seems to be no room for it here. Note that, though there appear to be just two addressees, the plural form of the pronoun "you" is used here and on other occasions rather than the dual form.³⁰

Line 5: By the norms of classical Arabic this should read *wa-tażlimūn*. One could emend it to *fa-tażlimū* ("with the result that you oppress"), but since the next few verbs end in *-ū* rather than the expected *-ūn* it is probably better to read it as it is.³¹ The papyrus becomes very fragmentary at this point, but what follows is presumably an adverb or adverbial phrase qualifying the preceding verbs.

Line 6: The first word, *dħalika*, is clearly written, though, if the second word is indeed the female relative pronoun *allatī* (it is oddly written), one would have expected the feminine form *tilka*. Presumably both words refer to the thing that has been wrongfully appropriated by the addressees of the letter and which is consistently alluded to in this letter as a feminine object. Bayyān

²⁸ *Excavations at Nessana*, 3.159 (regarding P. Nessana 56).

²⁹ See Khan, *Arabic Papyri*, 25, who notes that "this formula fell from general use by the end of the second century AH."

³⁰ This is common; see Hopkins, *Studies*, §§84–6.

³¹ For other examples of this phenomenon in papyri see *ibid.*, §138.

is now speaking of the consequences of his addressees' actions. The second verb can best be read as a second form passive (i.e., *tuwajja‘ū*) – “you will be made to feel pain” (i.e., you will be punished) – though one could take it as an elided fifth form (i.e., *tawajja‘ū* for *tatawajja‘ū*, “you will feel pain”), a grammatical feature that already occurs in the Qur’ān.³² The last part of this line is fragmentary, but probably the sense is that what the addressees of the letter will be made to regret was in any case forbidden to them.

Line 7: There are some fragments of letters visible in this line, especially some ascendants (i.e., *alifs* or *lāms*), but it is very difficult to propose a reading with any degree of confidence. Below the *fi-hā* of line 6 there is a word that appears to end in *alif lām*; before it is a short curving letter and so one might read *qāla* (“he said”) or *māl* (“wealth, money”), but without any context it is impossible to say for sure.

Line 8: There are some traces of letters after the initial *wāw* and there is a clear *nūn*, but the rest is very uncertain. The word that I have read as *ghāliba* bears no diacritical marks and so could also be read as *ghāliya* (“excessive, expensive”) or *‘āliya* (“high”), but the word *ghalaba* (“seize, take possession of, overwhelm, etc.”) seems appropriate to the context (it features again in line 22).

Line 9: The first part of this line is illegible bar the tips of some ascendant letters, but it evidently conveyed the first part of the accusation leveled by Bayyān against his addressees; the rest of the line deals with the second part of the accusation. The pronoun *-hā* suffixed to *thaman* (note the three dots aligned vertically above the first letter) again refers to the thing that has suffered misappropriation at the hands of the addressees of the letter, perhaps the village (*qarya*) of Nessana itself.

Line 10: Because of the large lacuna in the middle of the right-hand part of the papyrus one cannot read anything here, but presumably the sense is that the addressees of the letter have misappropriated assets of some kind even though the sender of the letter had forbidden or opposed such action.

Line 11: One could plausibly read *laysa* before *la-hu* (i.e., “neither is there due to him”), as there is the remainder of a final tail before the *la-hu*, which could belong to a final *sīn*. Moreover, it would seem that the sender is here emphasizing that Yazīd had no right to demand either of two things from the people

³² Thackston, *Koranic and Classical Arabic*, 175; Hopkins, *Studies*, §40 n. 1.

of Nessana. The place name Nessana is commonly written with an infix t: in Arabic, as Niṣṭān (e.g., P. Nessana 60–1), and in Greek as Nestanon (e.g., P. Nessana 58–63, 65–8). For the term *dhimma*, see the discussion above.

Line 12: The *sīn* of *rasūlī-hi* is absent bar its first tooth, but it is the only letter long enough to fill the gap and *rasūlī-hi* does fit the context.

Line 13: Now that he has set out the issue at stake, the sender moves on to the next part of the letter, the redress, beginning with the standard formula: “when this letter of mine reaches you . . .”³³ As is common in early Islamic documents, the *hamza* of *jā'a* is not written, nor is the medial *alif* of *kitāb*.³⁴ The last word of this line must be a verb in the imperative with the sense of “pay attention to” or “take note of (what I have just told you).”

Line 14: The link between the *lām* and the *tā'* of *allatī* is oddly written, but it seems impossible to read anything else here; presumably the feminine form of the relative pronoun is influenced by the thing that has been violated by the addressees, possibly the village of Nessana itself or the proceeds/revenue from it. The word before *fa-wa-llāhi* ends in two ascendant letters, probably *alif* and *lām*; the tail that ends below the *fa* of *fa-wa-llāhi* is probably the tail of the *lām* (cf. the final *lām* of *ahl* in line 11) or it could belong to a final *yā'* (so reading *ilā*). A curved letter seems to precede this, probably a *fā'* or *qāf*, but it is difficult to suggest a plausible reading here. Nevertheless, the sense of the passage is clear: “(pay attention to) what I have just explained/indicated to you.” One expects a verb after *fa-wa-llāhi lā* and the final *nūn* that is visible at the end of the following word very likely indicates that it is in the energetic form; the sense must be “do not take.”

Line 15: At the beginning of this line it is tempting to assume a repeat of the word *thaman-hā* that occurs in line 9, which would fit nicely here. Although the *lām* of *illā* is mostly missing, the curve of the base of *lām*, *alif* is clearly visible, making the reading *lā* certain. *Amwāl* is written without medial *ā* (see note 34 above). The first letter of the following word can only be *jīm-hā²-khā'*, and given that some sort of particle that can govern a verb is required, *hattā* is

33 It is, for example, very commonly encountered in the correspondence of the governor Qurra ibn Sharik (709–14); e.g., Grohmann, *World*, 125, 127, and 129.

34 Hopkins, *Studies*, §19 (*hamza*: “in the language of the early papyri *hamza*, the glottal stop, barely exists”); §10 (“*scriptio defectiva* of medial *ā* . . . is extraordinarily frequent in the early papyri”).

the only option; it is written with *alif* at the end rather than *alif maqṣūra*, either by mistake or perhaps reflecting the fact that the writing of final ā at this time was still not fixed.³⁵

Line 16: Only one letter of the first word is visible and so the reading of *yujzā* (“will be penalized”) is conjectural, but it fits both the sense and the space well. Note that, after using only the plural up to this point, the scribe puts the imperative *i’lam* in the singular and in the next line uses the singular form of the second person object pronoun.

Line 17: The presence of God and beneficence together suggest that some sort of optative statement is being made here, as in the wish that very commonly appears in papyri: “May God increase His beneficence towards you” (*zāda Allāh fī iḥsān / iḥsānihi ilayka*). I am not convinced by the reading *yanbagħi bayn al-fadħħayn*, but it is difficult to think of what else would fit the visible letter forms and the sense of the passage.

Line 18: Here and in line 24 *al-salām* is written without medial ā (see note 34 above) and *rahma* (“mercy”) is written with a *tā’-maftūha*, as often in early Arabic texts, rather than a *tā’-marbūṭa*, as is standard in later texts.³⁶

(Letter 2)

Line 20: Here we see Yazīd ibn Fā’id addressed directly, whereas in the first letter he is only mentioned indirectly (in line 10, where his name is written with two dots under the “i” of Fā’id).

Line 21: Although the first part of the line is fragmentary, this opening phrase is so standard that one can fill it in with certainty (see above). I use the word “further” to translate *ammā ba’du*, since it has become standard, but the point of the Arabic phrase is to signal the transition from the preliminaries (usually specifying the sender and recipient and giving a pious salutation) to the object of the letter. A better translation might, therefore, be: “moving on” (to the main business).

Line 22: The first word ends in *fa* and the tail of what looks like a *ra’* comes before that, which makes the reading *a’rafū* all but certain. The omission of

35 For example, in the dam inscription of the caliph Mu‘āwiya from Tā’if the long “a” in *banā-hu* is written with a “y” (*bnyh*).

36 Hopkins, *Studies*, §10 (medial ā); §47.

the first name of Ibn Ḥusayn is derogatory, which is apt given that he is being rebuked here. Irfan Shahid suggested to me that this character should be identified with the ‘Ubayd Allāh of the first letter, which is possible, but cannot be confirmed.

Line 23: In the first part of this line the sender is recommending a course of action that would involve – so the context would suggest – Yazid reclaiming control over the village in question (perhaps Nessana) from Ibn Ḥusayn, or else someone more effective would be sent. The first clause ends with what looks like ‘alayhi (the ‘ayn and lām are very clear and the yā’ and hā’ are plausible), which presumably refers to Ibn Ḥusayn. One can discern an ascendant letter before it, which I think is the *alif* of hā’, the feminine object pronoun, referring here to the contested village (*qarya*). It must be suffixed to the verb of the sentence, which evidently has the sense of take or win control of.

Line 24: The implied sense of *yakfi-hā* is that the person would rectify the situation and make sure that matters ran smoothly again, in particular that the village’s taxes would be paid.³⁷

Appendix by Hannah Cotton On the Rediscovery of P. Nessana 77³⁸

Just so that we appreciate the rediscovery of P. Nessana 77, something should be said about the corpus to which it belongs. It hails from the village of Nessana, written in the sixth–seventh centuries, thus bridging the transition from the late Roman period to the Arabic period in Palestine. Sadly, the collection has not attracted much attention,³⁹ though it has been the object of a recent doctoral thesis by Rachel Stroumsa, entitled, “People and Identities in Nessana” (Duke University, 2008). It is to her dissertation that I owe my renewed interest in this wonderful corpus.

³⁷ It is used in this sense in a late Umayyad letter on marble from northern Syria (see Hoyland, “New Early Arabic Inscriptions from Syria and Arabia,” no. 2).

³⁸ This appendix, dedicated to Patricia Crone, was originally given as a short lecture intended as an introduction to a presentation of P. Nessana 77 by Robert Hoyland in Jerusalem in May 2012. The aim here is simply to set out the circumstances of this papyrus’s rediscovery.

³⁹ Their importance was highlighted by Patricia Crone herself in 1987 (*Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, 5, 14, and 97) and she made use of one of the papyri in her study with Adam Silverstein on “The Case of Lot-Casting,” esp. 424.

The documentary papyri from Nessana were listed on three very crowded pages in Cotton, Cockle, and Millar's "The Papyrology of the Roman Near East: A Survey," and received half a page in Jean Gascou's summary in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*:

If Byzantinists have been slow to take into account the Egyptian papyri of late antiquity, they have been quicker to take an interest in those of Nessana. This Byzantine and Umayyad corpus (spanning the years from 500 to 700) was discovered in 1935 at el-Auja, on the frontier between the Sinai and the Negev, in the village of Nessana, which, like Petra, was part of the Byzantine province of Palestine III, a product of the breakup of the old province of Arabia. The Nabataean cultural and linguistic base is still visible, notably in personal names. These papyri were probably discarded, but, instead of being destroyed, they were kept in rooms attached to religious establishments. These texts are essentially Greek, but some are bilingual Greek-Arabic or entirely Arabic. Not all of them were published and the approximately two hundred literary and documentary pieces available in two volumes would benefit from revision.⁵⁸

Gascou's wish to see revisions of both volumes will partly come true in the case of the Virgilian texts of the literary dossier published in 1950 by Casson and Hettich as volume two of *Excavations at Nessana*. Dr. Maria Chiara Scappaticcio includes the glossary (in Latin and Greek) of Virgil's *Aeneid* (P. Nessana II.1) and fragments of books II to VI of the *Aeneid*, in Latin, in her *Papyri Vergilianae*, which is a complete edition of Virgilian papyri.⁴⁰

In a footnote to his observation that "not all of them were published," Gascou cited as an example P. Nessana 77, which the publisher of the archive thought was lost or mislaid. So what happened to P. Nessana 77? Allow me to go back to the late nineties of the last century when Ms. Lena Libman, curator of the papyri in the Israel Antiquities Authority, and I initiated the preparation of an analytical catalog of *all* the documentary papyri from the Judean Desert and adjoining areas. This was intended to identify each and every papyrus and relate it to its respective modern publication. In the course of our cataloging we came across a papyrus written on both sides, but with no indication of its provenance. Not being able to struggle with the fragmentary and faded Greek text on one side, or even attempt to read the Arabic text on the other, I thought

40 A review of the first volume of Nessana Papyri by Nock in *Speculum* (1951) cautiously asks "is it possible that the study of Virgil here is partly to be explained from the fact that this was a garrison post on the frontier?", which immediately brought to my mind the piece of Latin papyrus discovered by Yadin on top of Masada (presumably the work of a Roman soldier) with line 9 of the famous fourth book of the *Aeneid*: *Anna soror quae me suspensam insomnia terrent*, spoken by Dido after falling in love with Aeneas. The papyrus was published by Cotton and Geiger, in *Masada II*, no. 721.

it would be a good idea to write Nessana with a question mark next to its provisional number, Lena no. 153. For what other provenance could there be for a papyrus in Israel with Greek on the one side and Arabic on the other? As it turned out, this happened to be a very fortunate decision.

In late 2003, photographs were made of the Arabic side and given to Professor David Wasserstein, then at Tel Aviv University. We informed the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) that the two of us believed that its bilingual nature made it one of the most interesting papyri discovered in this country. Unfortunately, a short time later David moved to the city of Nashville, Tennessee, with the photos, which were destroyed in recent floods. P. Lena no. 153 was forgotten till Robert Hoyland got wind of its existence while a visiting professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in 2009–10. Before visiting the papyrus in the IAA section of the Israel Museum, Robert read in the small print of the notes to P. Nessana 56 (a bilingual papyrus with six lines of Arabic preceding the Greek) a reference (see page 159 of *Excavations at Nessana* 3) to an Arabic side of P. Nessana 77: “The name of the first witness, Yazīd ibn Fā’id, occurs also in the Arabic *verso* of 77.” P. Nessana 77 *recto* is not a very exciting document: it is an account of “Tax Receipts” dated to c. 685, which, to cite the editor, “gives the impression of an official daybook of receipts.” But lo and behold, the introduction contained the following information:

This papyrus is known to me [that is, to Casper Kraemer] only from a photograph made by the Department of Antiquities in the Palestine Antiquities Museum and marked inventory number 13.360, provenance Auja Hafir. All efforts to locate the original, however, or to account for its separation from the rest, have been without avail, and it is presumably lost or misplaced.⁴¹

Kraemer adds, though, that what he sees in the photograph is clearly from Nessana, since the people mentioned in it are all known from other papyri found in Nessana, and it is closely related to no. 76, “A Register of Payers of Poll Tax.” Now that we had become aware of the fact that a papyrus was lost and possessed the name of a person mentioned in it, life was made easy: no sooner did Robert glance at the Arabic side of Lena no. 153 than he spotted Yazīd ibn Fā’id’s name there (in line 10). We also checked the Greek on the other side of the papyrus and indeed it corresponded to the Greek text of P. Nessana 77 as published by Kraemer.

It was no more than a hunch when I put a question mark next to an attribution to Nessana. However, there is no doubt now that we have found the lost P. Nessana 77, whose Arabic side has never been published. We can now remove the label “Lena no. 153,” though perhaps it would be sensible to keep the label as a reminder of the fact

⁴¹ Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*, 3:222.

that none of the papyri from Nessana, apart from the mislaid P. Nessana 77, remained in Israel. All the other papyri from Nessana were, and still are, stored in the Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum of New York, which is very restrictive in providing photographs of the papyri (there are hardly any in Kraemer's publication).⁴²

This is the right place to thank Lena Libman and Pnina Shor of the IAA for their help and encouragement in retrieving the no longer lost papyrus. No one could have been more generous and helpful.

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⁴² Professor Roger Bagnall (Institute for Study of the Ancient World, New York) has now informed us that the Pierpont Morgan Library has agreed to allow its papyrus collection to be scanned and made available online, which it is to be hoped will happen by the end of 2014.

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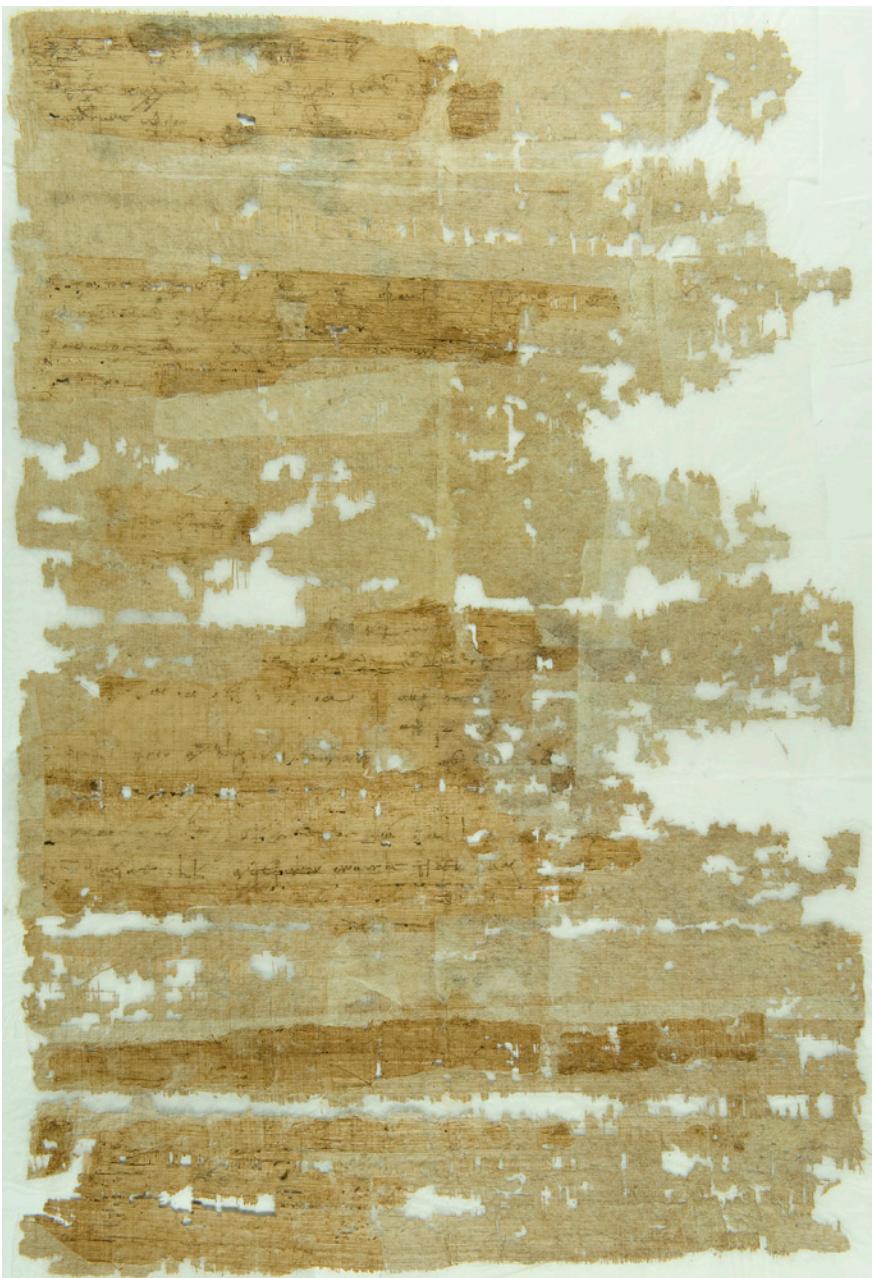


FIGURE 2.1 *The Greek text of P. Nessana 77*

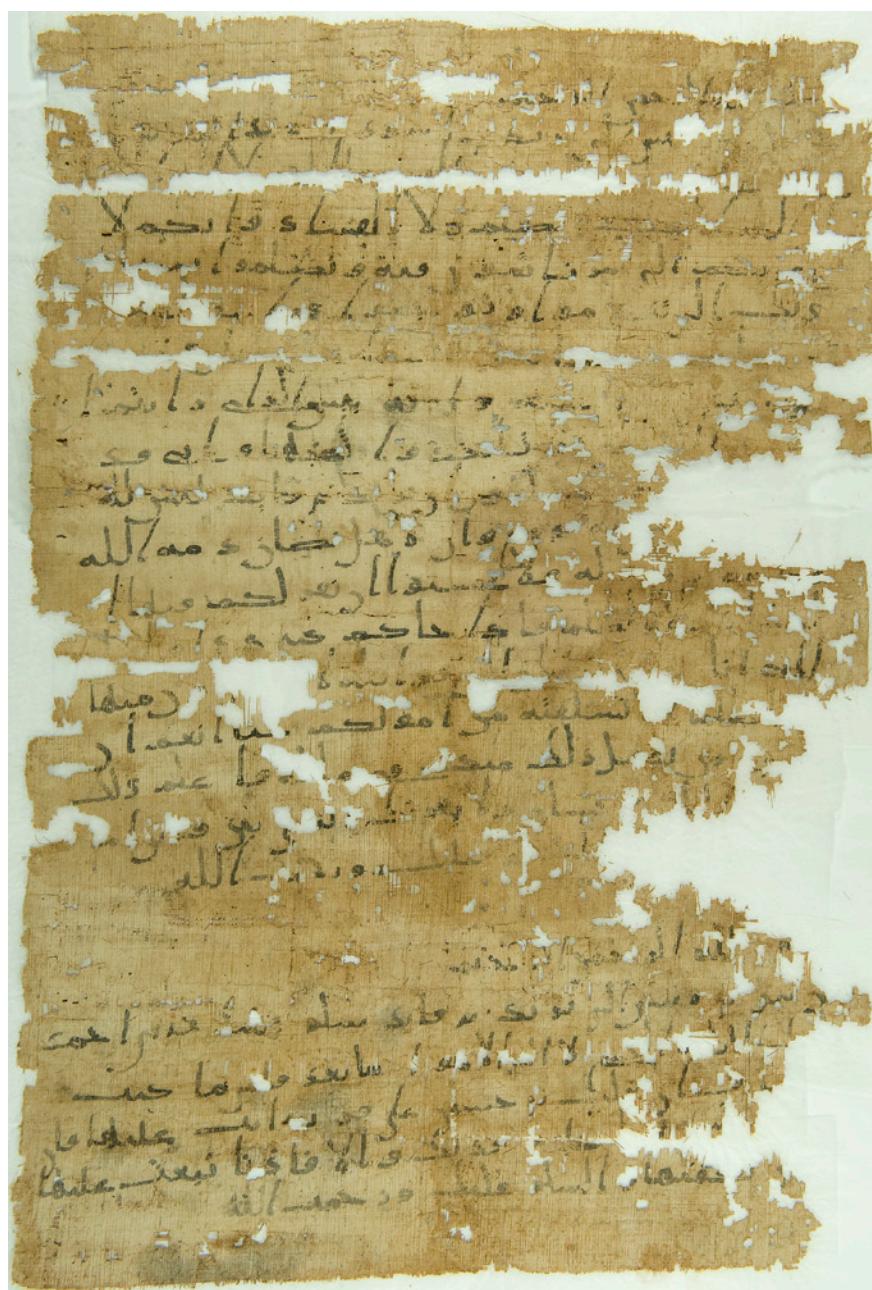


FIGURE 2.2 *The Arabic text of P. Nessana 77*

Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins

Guy G. Stroumsa

In an article published in 1980, “Islam, Judaeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” Patricia Crone sought to find a link between an early Christian heresy and the birth of Islam.¹ More than three decades later, she has returned to the topic of Jewish Christianity, this time in connection with the text of the Qur’ān.² Throughout her career, Professor Crone has retained an iconoclastic mind and a passion for challenging scholarly orthodoxies and retrieving ancient heresies. Moreover, as her recently published *magnum opus*, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge, 2012), amply shows, she has never forgotten that early Islamic doctrines can only be fully understood in the context of earlier religious trends, in Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. In the following pages, through a renewed reflection on Jewish Christianity and Islamic origins, I wish to pay a modest tribute to an exceptionally brilliant, daring and original scholar, who has put so many in her debt, far beyond the traditional boundaries of Islamic studies.

It is to the Irish freethinker John Toland (1668–1722) that we owe the concept of Jewish (or Judaeo-) Christianity. In 1718, Toland published, in London, *Nazarenus, or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*. This text further developed ideas first presented in his French manuscript written in 1710, *Christianisme judaïque et mahométan*, which sought to offer a historical argument, recognizing the Jewish roots of Christianity, in order to promote the toleration of Jews in modern European societies.³

Toland based his argument upon the *Gospel of Barnabas*, an apocryphal writing of unknown date, the full text of which we only possess in an Italian

¹ Crone, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm.” For a slightly different French version of this text, see Stroumsa, “Judéo-christianisme et Islam des origines.”

² Crone, “Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān” (forthcoming). I should like to express my deep thanks to Professor Crone for having shared with me the draft of her article and for her incisive and useful comments on my own draft. Crone’s conclusion of her detailed research tally with my own: the Jewish Christians are “the most obvious candidates” for the role of transmitters of a number of Qur’ānic themes. I also wish to thank Sarah Stroumsa for her careful reading and for her very useful remarks on this article.

³ On Toland’s conception of Jewish Christianity, see Palmer, *Ein Freispruch für Paulus*.

version of a lost Spanish one. This text announces the coming of Muḥammad and makes reference to the *shahāda*, the Muslim profession of faith. According to the *Gospel of Barnabas*, Jesus is a prophet, and not the Son of God, and does not die on the cross. In his stead, it is Judas Iscariot who is crucified.⁴ A human rather than a divine Jesus, and a Docetist conception of the Passion: these traits are typical of the figure of Jesus both for the Jewish Christians and in the Qur’ān. For Toland, some of the fundamental doctrines of Islam are rooted in the “most ancient monuments of the Christian religion,” and not in the views of the Nestorian monk Sergius.⁵ It is to Toland’s refutation by the Lutheran orthodox theologian Lorenz von Mosheim (1693–1755), *Vindiciae antiquae christianiorum disciplinae*, published in 1720, that Toland’s book owed its fame, and the concept of Jewish Christianity its survival. Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), the founder of the Tübingen school of New Testament studies, made *Judenchristentum* a cornerstone of his conception of Christian origins. For the Hegelian that he was, second century Christianity represented the synthesis or sublimation (*Aufhebung*) of Petrine Christianity and Paulinian (“gentile”) Christianity. For most historians of early Christianity, it is Baur, rather than Toland, who is at the origin of the concept of Jewish Christianity, a phenomenon which would be studied, from Baur on, only in the first Christian centuries. Toland’s intuition, according to which one of the earliest manifestations of Christianity, having survived late antiquity, had a major impact upon the earliest stages of Islam, and hence on the world history of religions, practically disappeared from the horizon of research. The Patristic sources do not speak, of course, of “Jewish Christianity.” From the second to the fourth century, the Patristic heresiographers usually mention the Ebionites (*ebionitoi*), whose name would have come from their imaginary founder, a certain Ebion. In fact, it comes from their insistence upon the spiritual value of poverty: they call themselves *evyonim* (“poor” in Hebrew), a Biblical term they borrowed from *Psalms*. The Christian heresiographers also mention other names of sects, in particular those of the Nazoreans (*nazoraioi*), who share, at least partly, Ebionite ideas. For the Nazoreans, Jesus was, rather than God’s Son, a prophet, the last of a long chain of true prophets, starting with Adam, in which each prophet is preceded by a false prophet. Moreover, Jesus had not died on the cross; the heresiographers often associate this Docetism with other doctrines of Jewish Christian groups.⁶

⁴ On the Gospel of Barnabas, see Cirillo and Frémaux (text and translation), *Evangile de Barnabé*.

⁵ Toland, *Nazarenus*; see Jones, *Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity*, 139.

⁶ On the Nazoreans, see especially Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*. Cf. Mimouni, “Les Nazoréens”. Cf. idem., *Le judéo-christianisme ancien*. Two recent studies: Skarsaune and

Historiographic revisionism is fashionable today. One often questions the usefulness of some of our concepts, such as Gnosticism, for a better understanding of historical realities. Thus, for example, the Talmudist Daniel Boyarin has expressed serious doubts concerning the possibility to speak of “Judaism” (*ioudasimos*) before the fourth century CE. For him, Jewish beliefs and practices are defined as such by Patristic theologians. Hence, more than reflecting historical reality, they reveal something about those using them.⁷ And since Boyarin believes that concept of “Judaism” is not valid in this period, he also proposes to abandon the concept of Jewish Christianity, without suggesting a clear alternative. But a historical phenomenon needs to be named if one is to study it.

Methodological remarks are always necessary, and sometimes useful. In the present case, however, I fail to see what one gains by replacing one concept by another. This is not the place for examining or refuting Boyarin’s approach. Suffice here to say that in any domain, research demands an intellectual effort to identify common denominators of various phenomena (for instance, multiple religious sects and groups). Such common denominators allow us to retrace central trends underlying the complexity of observable reality. One cannot fulfill this task without creating categories, the primary justification of which is their heuristic usefulness. Gnosticism or Jewish Christianity are examples of such categories, which cannot be abandoned, although they must be used with care, without forgetting what they are not: they are not truthful representations of historical reality. In particular, these categories do not reflect clearly identifiable groups. Thus, it is often among Jewish Christians (or in Jewish Christian texts or traditions) that we can find some easily identifiable Gnostic *theologoumena*, such as Docetism.⁸

By Jewish Christianity, I mean the faith of Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah announced by the prophets, but did not give up traditional Jewish religious practice. For Origen, in the first half of the third century, these Jewish Christians, who wished to be at once Jews and Christians, succeeded in being neither Jews nor Christians. One should note that the Jewish sources are singularly less prolix than the Christian ones: for the Rabbis, the best way of dealing with their enemies was to “kill them by silence.” Contemporary scholars thus rely on the perception of the Patristic sources, for which these archaic heretics had practically disappeared before the end of the fourth

Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, as well as Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered*.

⁷ Boyarin, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity.”

⁸ On Docetism and Jewish Christianity, see Stroumsa, “Christ’s Laughter,” as well as Stroumsa and Goldstein, “The Greek and Jewish Origins of Docetism.”

century. Consequently, most contemporary scholars treat the existence of Jewish Christian communities beyond the first centuries with deep skepticism.⁹

And yet, the Jewish Christians of antiquity (who are unrelated to the contemporary “Jews for Jesus,” whose theology is that of Evangelical Christianity) do not seem to have disappeared from the late antique scene. The sources (or at least the reliable ones) are quite scarce, and hard to interpret. Another method, then, is needed in order to detect the presence of Jewish Christians, in particular through the use of common sense and the careful interpretation of indirect sources. To be sure, late antique Jewish Christian communities must have been small, marginal groups, often living in a protecting isolation. As far as I know, there is no clear-cut and irrefutable proof of their existence in the seventh century. But the traces they left constitute enough circumstantial evidence to let us assume their continued existence long after the end of the fourth century (when Epiphanius and Jerome testify unambiguously to their presence) and their *Fortleben*. John of Damascus mentions, in the early eighth century, the existence “to this day” of a Jewish Christian Elchasaite group, the Sampseans, on the shores of the Dead Sea.¹⁰ His testimony is usually rejected by scholars, as he repeats what Epiphanius of Salamis had written in the fourth century. And yet, one must remember that John writes from the monastery of Mar Saba, in the Judean wilderness, a place very close to the Dead Sea (a few kilometers as the crow flies). It is improbable that John’s mention of heretics living on the shores of the Dead Sea does not refer to a concrete reality. The very late existence of such groups, however, is less striking than the impact they may have had, much beyond their own boundaries.

Among the various theories on the origins of Islam, those involving the Jewish Christians seem fashionable today. This may be a bit puzzling, since Toland’s *Nazarenus* was for all practical purposes forgotten long ago. It is the liberal theologian and great historian of early Christianity Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) who seems to be at the origin of the present trend of thought. In a few pages of his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (1909), he had proposed to identify in some Jewish Christian *theologoumena* some of the most important

⁹ Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land*, represents the *opinio communis* when he notes (p. 80): “no significant Jewish Christians communities were left in Palestine itself” (in the fourth century).

¹⁰ John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus*, 53. Although John repeats here a text from Epiphanius, one is allowed to receive his testimony, as he writes from Mar Saba, in the Judean Desert, a monastery very close to the Dead Sea. On the Elchasaites, see in particular Luttkhuizen, *The Revelation of Elchasai*.

sources of earliest Islam.¹¹ Harnack, who had no particular interest in Islam, rejoined Toland through his intuition on the similarity between prophecy and Docetism in the Qur’ān (Q 4.157) and among the Ebionites. To the suggestive remarks of Harnack, one should add those of Ernest Renan and Daniel Chwolson, in two studies published in the 1850s, to which we shall return presently.¹² Thus, a number of Baptist and Jewish Christian sects from the first centuries were brought to bear upon the study of Islamic origins.

Over the years, Harnack's intuition regarding Jewish Christian origins was picked up and developed by a number of scholars – first by the New Testament scholar Adolf Schlatter, and then, in particular, by Hans-Joachim Schoeps, the great specialist of Jewish Christianity in the early centuries.¹³ The most serious difficulty of the thesis on the Jewish Christian impact on the Qur’ān, however, remained the fact that our documentation on Jewish Christian communities rarely goes beyond the fourth century. With no chronological and geographical proximity, the structural similarities between Jewish Christian theology and some Qur’ānic verses remained parallels, certainly interesting from a phenomenological viewpoint, but useless for explaining the transmission of these *theologoumena* to the Qur’ān. Thanks to a series of discoveries and studies, our knowledge of the early Jewish Christians has now become more precise. We now know that some Jewish Christian communities may have survived, at least in Palestine, until the Muslim conquests.¹⁴ It is certainly not far-fetched to imagine a possible Jewish Christian presence in late antique Hijāz.

Rather than offering a new theory, I should like to offer here a *status quaestionis*, adding some methodological and epistemological reflections on the way in which the question is framed today for the historian of late antique religion – a historian who, in my case, in no way claims competence to proffer an opinion on the redaction of the Qur’ān or the formation of Islam. As in the

¹¹ Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, II, 529–38. As noted by Sidney Griffith, Julius Wellhausen had already emitted the same hypothesis in *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, 232. See Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 36, n. 84.

¹² Renan, “Note sur l’identité de la secte gnostique des Elchasaites”; in the following year appeared Chwolson, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*. Cf. Fahd, “Şâbi'a.”

¹³ Schlatter, “Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam”; Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*. See also Andrae, *Mahomet, sa vie et sa doctrine*, 99: “La notion d’une révélation particulière à chaque peuple est tout-à-fait étrangère à la doctrine chrétienne de la révélation.” Again, ibid., 107: “L’idée de révélation chez Mahomet témoigne donc d’une parenté avec la doctrine ébionite-manichéenne, qui ne peut être fortuite.”

¹⁴ See Arculf’s testimony (n. 53 below), as well as the studies of Shlomo Pines discussed below.

case of Christianity or Manichaeism, Islam permits us to observe how a religion is born, although we know infinitely more about the birth of Christianity than about that of Islam.

For almost two centuries now, research on Islamic origins seems to have oscillated between two main options. In 1834, the young Abraham Geiger published his monograph on Muhammad's Jewish sources, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen?* Geiger insisted on Midrashic traditions the traces of which can be discovered in various suras. Geiger's central idea, the deep impact of some Jewish traditions on the Qur'ān, was generally accepted by Orientalists. This acceptance stands in stark contradistinction to his perception of Jesus as having been close to the Pharisees, an idea which all Christian theologians rejected with deep horror (one of them, the Hebraist Franz Delitzsch, wrote that calling Jesus a Pharisee was "ten times worse" than the crucifixion). A long list of (usually Jewish) scholars, familiar with rabbinic literature, has pursued research following in Geiger's footsteps. It is mainly thanks to the great Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (who was very impressed by Geiger's book) that research looked for the Christian sources of Islam. For Nöldeke, Islam actually represented the Arabic form of Christianity. The learned Swedish bishop Tor Andrae would pursue Nöldeke's research, insisting on the fact that the Christian orthodox traditions are not the only sources reflecting the Qur'ān's background, and that one should not forget Jewish Christianity (or Manichaeism, for that matter) as possible roots of Qur'ānic doctrines. Such an approach is still favored today by scholars such as Günter Lüling or Christoph Luxenberg, for whom the source of the Qur'ān (the *Ur-Qur'ān*) is to be found in Syriac Christian hymns (Arian for Lüling).¹⁵ Until today, research does not seem to have really rephrased the problem and continues to oscillate between Judaism and Christianity in order to better understand the birth of Islam.¹⁶

In 614, the Byzantine Empire suffered a humiliating defeat by the Sasanians. Yet, this was only the foretaste of the amputation of much of its territory a few decades later with the Islamic conquests. Tensions ran high and the heightened expectation of the last days, the *Endzeit*, encouraged a renewal of an apocalyptic mode of thought.¹⁷ Eschatological *furore* was as alive among the

¹⁵ Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān*; Luxenberg, *Die Syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*.

¹⁶ See for instance Gilliot, "Les 'informateurs' juifs et chrétiens de Muhammad." One must not forget the dynamic interface between Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity, on which see, for instance, Stroumsa, "Religious Dynamics."

¹⁷ Averil Cameron writes: "Islam took shape within a context of extreme religious and cultural tension." See her "Eastern Provinces." On the context of nascent Islam, see, for instance, Donner, "The Background to Islam."

Jewish communities as among the Christian populations. For the Jews, however, the interpretation of coming events was strictly the opposite to that of the Christians: the antichrist and the violent tribulations expected by the Christians (before Christ's return in glory), was the Jews' messiah.¹⁸ For both Jews and Christians, the eschatological expectations were anchored in a long tradition, but this tradition had become blurred or neutralized in the course of the centuries (for the Christians, mainly since the Constantinian revolution). Yet, eschatological expectations had never quite disappeared. Rather, they had become an underground stream, ready to reappear in times of dramatic events.

The conquest of Jerusalem and the captivity of the True Cross in 614, which represented for the Byzantines a true military, political, and religious catastrophe were perceived by Jews as a messianic promise.¹⁹ We have learned to recognize the centrality of Jerusalem for the earliest stages of Islam. Some indications suggest that the military defeat of the Byzantines and the Muslim conquest of the Holy City were perceived by the Jews as signs that the messiah and the end of times were near. For the Jews, the Muslim conquerors could have appeared as announcing the Messiah. Indeed, it seems that the early architectural activity of the new masters of the Temple Mount – for them, *al-Haram al-sharīf* – was interpreted by Jews as announcing the coming of the *Endzeit*. It might even have been perceived in that way by the Muslims themselves, as suggested by Andreas Kaplony, in his detailed study of the Islamic sources.²⁰

In the last generation, and in particular since the publication of Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), late antiquity is no longer defined only by the joint presence of pagans and Christians in the Roman world. In a number of aspects, the Islamic conquests retained the cultural traditions of the Roman Empire and Greek remained the administrative language under the early Umayyads. Hence, historians now commonly agree that late antiquity continues at least until the end of the Umayyad period.

In parallel to the extension of the chronological limits of late antiquity, we can witness today the extension of its geographical boundaries. In particular, we have learned to recognize that the Arabian peninsula, considered previously to have been located on the margins of the *oikoumene* and to have played a rather limited historical and cultural role, must now be considered to have been an integral part of the world of late antiquity. This is particularly true, in our present context, in the realm of religious ideas and practices. Robert Hoyland, who has significantly contributed to a better knowledge of the

¹⁸ See Stroumsa, "False Prophet."

¹⁹ On this, see Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*.

²⁰ Kaplony, *The Haram of Jerusalem*. See further Stroumsa, "Christian Memories."

complex religious milieu of earliest Islam, can refer to late antique Arabia as a “laboratory” for observing the transformation of religious traditions, the end of paganism, and the birth of Islam.²¹

In order to understand in what sense Arabia can be called a laboratory for religious change, one can refer to Max Weber. For Weber, it was not by chance that the prophets of Israel belonged to a marginal society, outside the main political, economic, and cultural centers of the ancient Near East. For him, it was precisely the relative distance from those centers that made possible fruitful exchanges between periphery and center, as well as the birth of new forms of cultural and religious expression. According to Weber, the creative tension permitting the birth of such new forms demands some distance between two societies, one of which is to an extent dependent upon the other. This distance, however, should not be too great, lest it prevents cultural communication.²²

Mutatis mutandis, late antique Arabia is like ancient Israel: in permanent contact with the great political centers of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, as well as with the religious trends throughout the region.²³ From the 570s and the Sasanian conquest of Yemen, Arabia is practically surrounded by the Persians. Under such conditions, the slow but clear religious evolution at work since Hellenistic times, from polytheism to monotheism, has a powerful impact upon the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula.

We now know that, at the end of the sixth century, Arabia had become, as it were, a *plaque tournante* of the Near East, between the Sasanian and the Byzantine Empires as well as Axum's Christian kingdom.²⁴ In Arabia, monks, dissidents, missionaries, soldiers, refugees, and merchants, all facilitated, *inter alia*, the free circulation of religious ideas.²⁵ Since the last years of the sixth century, Arabia absorbed the repercussions from the conflict between the two empires.²⁶ It is probably in the context of the eschatological tensions mentioned above that one should understand what Christian Robin has called the “prophetic movement” in early seventh century Arabia. As Robin has also noted, new epigraphic discoveries reflect the religious crisis long undermining traditional beliefs in Arabia.²⁷ Many opted for a form of monotheism, but

²¹ Hoyland, “Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion,” 1053–77, esp. 1069.

²² Weber, *Ancient Judaism*.

²³ See esp. Robin, “Arabia and Ethiopia.”

²⁴ Bowersock, *Throne of Adulis*.

²⁵ See Sarris, *Empires of Faith*.

²⁶ On this, see Bowersock, *Empires in Collision*.

²⁷ Robin, “Les signes de la prophétie,” esp. 472–3. Tor Andrae already spoke of Muhammad's eschatological piety. Cf. Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams*, 59.

the precise nature of this monotheism escapes us, although it seems to have followed “Jewish” patterns. Iwona Gadja has been able to show how a similar kind of monotheism developed in Ḥimyar, in the cracks, as it were, between Judaism and Christianity as Jews and Christians vied for power.²⁸

Our knowledge of the presence of Jewish and Christian communities in the Ḥijāz in Western Arabia is very limited. There are no remaining imprints of Christian communities north of the Yemen. François Villeneuve writes that in Arabia, Christianity never succeeded in getting a foothold south of ‘Aqaba.²⁹ Moreover, the testimonies regarding the existence of Jewish tribes in the Ḥijāz do not enlighten us on the nature of their Judaism, although some clues would point to Jews coming from Palestine.³⁰ Even if one can detect the impact on earliest Islam of some ideas originating in the Sasanian realm,³¹ the Qur’ān clearly points to the fact that the main religious trends underlying Islamic monotheism come from Jewish and Christian milieus.

Reading the Qur’ān in the light of late antique literature, as Angela Neuwirth suggests, is meaningful only if it is made clear that what is meant are Jewish or Christian late antique texts.³² Classical *paideia* and the Greek philosophical tradition, which are of crucial importance in late antiquity, will have a major impact on Islamic culture, but only later in ‘Abbāsid Baghdad. Even if limited to its Jewish and Christian expressions, however, late antique culture in the Near East offered a rich gamut of exegetical possibilities. All sectarian and hermeneutical trends stemming from the foundational texts of Jews and Christians must therefore be studied together. These include not only the various Jewish Christian groups as mentioned by the Christian heresiologists, such as the Ebionites, the Nazoreans, or the Elchasaites, but also Gnostic and Manichaean dualists, and also the “noble” heresies of Monophysitism and Nestorianism, who together represent the majority of late antique Christians in the Near East, from Egypt and Syria to Armenia and Iran.

In 1978, John Wansbrough, who taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, published *The Sectarian Milieu*, a book in which he sought to identify, beyond the multiple communities in Arabia at the dawn of Islam, a conflict of hermeneutics and even a midrashic mythopoeisis, within which

²⁸ Gadja, “Quel monothéisme en Arabie du sud ancienne?”

²⁹ Villeneuve, “La résistance des cultes béthyliques,” 228.

³⁰ On the Jews of Ḥijāz, see Hoyland, “Jews of the Hijaz.”

³¹ See Shaked, “Popular Religion in Sasanian Babylonia,” esp. 115. For the broader perspective, see Crone, *Nativist Prophets*.

³² See esp. Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*.

one should study the formation of the Qur'ān.³³ Wansbrough's approach had a powerful impact upon Patricia Crone, one of the two co-authors of *Hagarism*, a book published the preceding year.³⁴ *Hagarism* offers a fresh approach to Islamic origins, and establishes its argument solely on seventh-century sources, i.e., mainly, on Christian texts, while ignoring the Islamic (Arabic) sources, all later, unless corroborated by other sources. To be sure, the reconstruction of Islamic origins thus obtained remains speculative, as the two authors willingly admit. Such a revisionist attitude, however, permits us to formulate anew the problem of Islamic origins within the frame of biblical hermeneutics among Jews and Christians.

The scholarly oscillation mentioned above between emphasizing either the Jewish or the Christian roots of Islam (and of course the various movements between these two main traditions) stems, I think, from an error of method. It is a mistake to choose between a number of options (postulated to be exclusive of one another) in order to identify the roots of theological ideas in earliest Islam. There is no reason to think that in a religious, cultural and political milieu as complex as in the sixth and seventh century Near East, Islam would have originated from a single source. Moreover, categories which propose a taxonomy of religious ideas tend to freeze them, suppressing their dynamism, erasing their free circulation and their constant restructuration in new forms.

In a world endowed with great social and religious complexity, the constant intersection and transformation of ideas and persons is the default option, as it were, and permanent fluidity is the essential rule. This is how one should conceive the interface between religious traditions in the Near East, an interface in which Islam was born. One should insist on the flow of religious ideas between communities. The formation of Islam and its early conquests restructured religious communities in the Near East and permitted the stabilization of both religious ideas and boundaries between communities. Referring to the transmission of ideas between religious communities in the Arabic Middle Ages, Sarah Stroumsa has spoken of a "whirlpool effect," as it is usually impossible to specify the origin of each specific element.³⁵

All this leads to what I propose to call the principle of non-exclusivity. I prefer to speak of communities rather than of sects, as this last term entails deviance vis-à-vis an orthodoxy, the existence of which cannot always be

³³ Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*. In that same year appeared Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a polemical book soon to become a cult book. On Wansbrough, see esp. Hawting, "John Wansbrough, Islam, and Monotheism."

³⁴ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, viii.

³⁵ Stroumsa, "Muslim Context," 54–7.

demonstrated.³⁶ Proper method demands that we do not identify a source as the sole origin of Qur'ānic terms or formulae, at the exclusion of other possible filiations. At the same time, the principle of non-exclusivity is also a principle of indetermination: in a world in which religious ideas circulate freely and transform themselves constantly, it is almost impossible to determine the precise origin of these ideas or the proximate channels through which they reached the Qur'ān.

Arguments highlighting the similarity between various Jewish Christian concepts and some Qur'ānic passages receive their full value only in a discourse insisting upon the plurality of the sources of earliest Islam. According to a number of Christian traditions, the Prophet had met a heretical monk who taught him certain Christian doctrines (in a perverse way, of course). As early as 1858, Nöldeke had raised the question of Muhammad's Christian teachers.³⁷ For him, however, the Arab "priest" Waraqā was a Jew rather than a Christian. In later Arabic sources, Waraqā is deemed to have been "a bishop from the Naṣārā," who "belonged to the Prophet's family." Although *naṣārā* usually refers to Christians, the term may also indicate the *Nazoraioi*, one of the Jewish Christian sects according to Patristic heresiologists.³⁸

After Hans Joachim Schoeps, Martiniano Pellegrino Roncaglia develops Harnack's thesis on the Jewish Christian origins of Islam, in reference to the traditions concerning Waraqā. For Roncaglia, like for the great German scholar of early Christianity, Islam represents the transformation on Arabic soil of what he calls "Gnostic Jewish Christianity." Roncaglia notes that the Islamic prohibition of wine seems to be "Elchasaite." To the best of my knowledge, no extant source mentions the prohibition of wine among the Elchasaites, although

³⁶ On the concept of community, see Fowden, "Religious Communities."

³⁷ For an updated *status quaestionis*, see Szilagyi, "Muhammad and the Monk."

³⁸ On *naṣārā*, see the references below to the studies of Gnilka and de Blois. On Waraqā, see Robinson, "Waraqa b. Nawfal." Robinson notes that we have few biographical details, most of them legendary, on Waraqā, an Arab monotheist contemporary of the Prophet. The possibility that Waraqā was an Ebionite or an Elksaite has caught the fancy of some contemporary Arab intellectuals. Thus Joseph Azzi, in a book written in Arabic and translated into French with the title *Le prêtre et le prophète*, suggests, without bringing any evidence, that "la véritable intention de Waraqā était de désigner Mohammed pour lui succéder à la tête de l'assemblée des nazaréens de la Mecque" (p. 85) and that he had tried to unify the Jewish Christian sects (p. 86). Cf. Gallez, *Le messie et son prophète*, as well as Vol. II: *Du Muhammad des Califes au Muhammad de l'histoire* and Vol. III: *Histoire et légendologie*, which refers to the various sources in a highly confused way. Gallez cites Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans*.

according to Irenaeus, the Ebionites abstain from wine.³⁹ For Roncaglia, moreover, the Jewish Christian idea of the true prophet lies at the root of the Islamic conception of prophecy. He also points out the similarity between the Ebionite conception of a diabolical falsification of Scripture and the Islamic concept of *tahrif*, i.e., the falsification of their revealed Scripture by Jews and Christians.⁴⁰

In a recently published book, the New Testament scholar Joachim Gnilka concludes a fresh analysis of the *našārā/nazoraiοι* file with a striking theological proximity between the Qur'ān and Jewish Christian traditions.⁴¹ Like other scholars before him, he notes the similarity between Sura 19 (*sūrat marīam*, which deals with Zachariah and the birth of John the Baptist) and the *Protoevangelium of James*. One must recognize that Gnilka's results are a bit disappointing, as he remains unable to explain the ways through which these Jewish Christian concepts may have reached early seventh century Hijāz.

For Roncaglia, as we have seen, Ebionites and Elchasaites are identical. Such an identification, however, is not based on the sources and nothing points to an Elchasaite presence in the Hijāz. The origin of this identification seems to go back to Renan, for whom the Qur'ān's Sabeans were Elchasaites and Mandaeans, and to Chwolson, who, in his great monograph on the Sabeans, had detected some Manichaean elements in Islam.⁴² The Baptist group within which Mani had grown up, in North Mesopotamia of the early third century, had been called *mughtasila* (Baptists) by the tenth-century Islamic bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm. These *mughtasila* seem to have had many affinities with the Elchasaites as the Christian heresiologists present them. The final proof of the identity between the two groups was made by the publication, in 1975, of the Cologne Mani Codex (CMC), an ancient biography of the Prophet of Light, found in a Greek version. This text preserves for us precious details on the Elchasaites as Mani had known them in his childhood and youth.⁴³

The discovery of the CMC has triggered renewed reflection on some remarkable parallels between Manichaeism and Islam. Robert Simon, who studied these parallels, has noted that one might have overstressed Judaism and

39 Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1:3; cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30:16, and Clement, *Stromata*, I:96, who refers to heretics celebrating the Eucharist with pure water. On wine in ancient Christianity, see McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*.

40 The idea of mistaken (or wrong) passages inserted in Scripture is found in the second century Valentinian theologian Ptolemy' *Epistle to Flora*. See for instance *Ep. Flora* 5.4 and 6.2 in Ptolemy, *Lettre à Flora*, 62–3 and 66–7.

41 Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran*.

42 See n. 12 above.

43 For the critical edition, see Koenen and Römer, *Der Kölner Mani-Code*. Cf. Henrichs, "Mani and the Babylonian Baptists."

Christianity as possible sources of Islam, and that the Manichaeian track has almost not been followed.⁴⁴ Simon calls attention to both the universal character of these two religions, from the time of their birth, and their conception of holy books. The most striking similarity concerns the notion of the “seal of the prophecy.” This notion, which is fundamental for the Qur’ānic idea of prophecy, can be found already in Manichaeism, as I have sought to demonstrate elsewhere. It originates in the Jewish Christian roots of the Religion of Light.⁴⁵ As noted by Simon, both Mani and Muḥammad perceive their prophetic role as being at once the summit and the conclusion of a long chain of prophets, from Adam to Jesus. The Manichaeans, for whom proselytizing was an essential religious duty, had moved to the north-east of the Arabian Peninsula. Simon also postulates the arrival of the Manichaeans in Mecca, with the Lakhmids, after the collapse of the kingdom of Ḥimyar following the Abyssinian conquest.⁴⁶ One should note with Patricia Crone, however, that there is no trace of Manichaeism in the Qur’ān itself.

In three important articles, published between 1995 and 2004, François de Blois has made significant contributions to research on the Sabeans in pre-Islamic Arabia, as well as to the terms *naṣrānī* (according to him an Arabic translation of *nazoraios*) and *ḥanīf* in the Qur’ān, and finally to the comparison between Manichaeism and Islam.⁴⁷ In the first of these articles, de Blois argues that the religious milieu in which Islam emerged included at least five religions: Arab paganism, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism. After the Maronite scholar Abraham Ecchellensis in 1660, Renan and Chwolson proposed in the nineteenth century, as we saw above, to identify the Qur’ān’s Sabeans with the Mandaeans. De Blois notes that there is no trace of a hypothetical Mandaean presence in seventh century Arabia.

In his article on *naṣrānī* and *ḥanīf*, de Blois first argues that in the Qur’ān *naṣrānā* indicate Nazorean Jewish Christians, rather than Christians. He then discusses the meaning of *hanīf*, a puzzling term of Aramaic origin. The Syriac equivalent is quite negative, as it refers to paganism, in contradistinction to the meaning of the term in the Qur’ān, where a *hanīf* is a believer in the true religion of Abraham. According to de Blois, the Qur’ānic conception of the *hanīf*

⁴⁴ Simon, “Mani and Muhammad.”

⁴⁵ See Stroumsa, “Seal of the Prophets.” Cf. Colpe, “Mohammed und Mani als Prophetensiegel,” esp. 237–8 (this article was first published in 1984). Via a different argument, Colpe and I reached the same conclusions.

⁴⁶ See Tardieu, “L’arrivée des manichéens,” as well as Tardieu, “L’Arabie du nord-est.”

⁴⁷ De Blois, “The ‘Sabians’”; idem, “*Naṣrānī* (*Nazoraios*) and *Ḥanīf* (*ethnikos*)”; idem, “Elchasai – Manes – Muḥammad.”

reflects a polemic against the Nazoreans, a fact which proves the presence of a Jewish Christian community in seventh century Arabia.

In "Elchasai – Manes – Muḥammad: Manichäismus und Islam in religions-historischen Vergleich," de Blois first offers a synthesis of the results of his investigations so far. Going further, he seeks to explain the remarkable parallels between those two syncretistic religions, Manichaeism and Islam. For him, these parallels, in particular those associated with the idea of prophecy in the two religions, come from their common Jewish Christian background. De Blois thus proposes to see in the idea of a "seal of prophecy" a Jewish Christian idea adopted by Muhammad, and concludes by noting that the Jewish Christians find themselves at the very epicenter of the history of religions in the Near East.

The *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* offer a major testimony in our quest for Ebionite central theological conceptions, such as the chain of prophecy through the ages. *Inter alia*, the pseudo-Clementine writings (both the Latin *Recognitions* and the Greek *Homilies*) develop the idea that some Scriptural passages were inserted by Satan, and must hence be expurgated from the sacred text.⁴⁸ This early Jewish Christian conception, which was picked-up by Marcion for some of the Gospels, will reappear in the (post-Qurānic) concept of *tahrīf*.⁴⁹

The latest contribution to our present problem which I should like to mention here is the work in progress by Holger Zellentin, who has discovered in some Qurānic passages striking parallels to a number of Patristic texts, in particular with the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and the *Didaskalia*, a fourth century text on ritual and legal precepts, rooted in the *Didache* (a Jewish Christian text from the early second century) as well as on Christology and scriptural hermeneutics. Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus in the fourth century and one of the major heresiologists, who was born in Eleutheropolis (Beit Guvrin), tells us that the *Didaskalia* is read by Audians in Palestine. We know precious little about the Audians, quartodeciman sectarians from Mesopotamia, who read apocryphal texts retaining anthropomorphic esoteric traditions on God's body. Henri-Charles Puech, who had been the first to call attention to the Audians, showed that some of their traditions were patently

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Pseudo-Clement, *Hom.* 2:15:17; cf. *ibid.* 2:38:1, as well as Pseudo-Clement, *Recognitiones* 1:21:8–9. See further Gobillot, "Das Begriff 'Buch'".

⁴⁹ On the idea of *tahrīf*, see Lazarus-Yafeh, "Tahrif," *EI*².

Gnostic. He was unable, however, to identify the (probably) Jewish origin of their conception of the divine body.⁵⁰

Whatever the case might be, the *Didaskalia* originates in a milieu close to the Jewish Christians, a fact reflected both by its ethics and its conception of ritual purity. Basing his reflections on this closeness, Zellentin believes that the text of the Qur’ān “responds” to a specific group of Jewish Christians in its audience. More precisely, the Qur’ān stands for him between Jewish Christians and Rabbinic Jews in its legal culture as well as in its approach to ritual practices. Although Zellentin still has to publish much of his recent research, what we already know of it suggests that it will open new horizons and a broadened discussion of Qur’ānic origins.⁵¹

One of the most striking parallels between the pseudo-Clementine writings and the Qur’ān is probably Peter’s claim, in the *Homilies*, that “God is one, and there is no God but Him.”⁵² Although this partial presence of the Qur’ānic *shahāda* in an early Jewish Christian writing has already been noticed, it does not seem to have received all the attention it deserves. Other similarities are worth noting, although they do not constitute concluding evidence, as for instance the Qur’ānic term “believers” (*mu’minūn*). The same word, indeed (*pisteuontes*) refers in the New Testament (*Acts*) to Jews having recognized Jesus as the Messiah without giving up on the practice of the biblical commandments in their traditional Jewish interpretation. In Patristic literature, from Origen to the testimony of Arculf, a Gaulish monk who came to the Holy Land on pilgrimage in the 680s, *pisteuontes* (or its Latin equivalent, *credentes*), often refers to Jewish Christians. Arculf, as quoted by Adomnan, mentions the existence in Jerusalem of a community of “believing” Jews, side-by-side with that of the Jews who refuse to recognize Jesus as the Messiah announced by the prophets.⁵³ Shlomo Pines has proposed to see in the Qur’ānic concept *mu’mīn*, plural *mu’mīnūn* (for instance, Q 2.62; 5.69; 22.17), a linguistic calque of the term *pisteuon* (or *credens*). According to him, “believers” would thus refer in the Qur’ān to Jewish Christians, side-by-side with the Jews, the Christians (*naṣārā*), the Sabeans and the Zoroastrians (*majūs*).⁵⁴ One should also note that the Qur’ānic *mushrikūn* (from *shirk*, association), traditionally perceived

⁵⁰ About the Audians, and for a discussion of Puech’s argument, see Stroumsa, “Jewish and Gnostic Traditions.”

⁵¹ Zellentin, *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*. See also idem, *Islam Before Muhammad* (forthcoming).

⁵² *Eis estin ho Theos, kai plen autou ouk estin Theos*: Pseudo-Clement, *Hom.*, 16:7:9.

⁵³ Adomnan, *De Locis Sanctis*, quoted by Pines, “Notes on Islam”, 326–8.

⁵⁴ Pines differs here from de Blois, for whom the Qur’ānic *naṣārā* are Jewish Christians.

as polytheists, are considered by Gerald Hawting and Patricia Crone to have been monotheists.⁵⁵

In a series of articles, published from 1966 to 1987, Pines offered what I consider to have been a very powerful argument for the survival of some Jewish Christian communities until at least early Islam.⁵⁶ Sadly, Pines' articles have not had the impact one could have imagined. This is due to both the technical nature of his arguments and to the fact that these publications are not always easy to find. Moreover, the conservative instinct of the scholarly community, to some extent still prisoner of the Patristic tradition, has proven unwilling to admit the survival of Jewish Christian groups after the fourth century.⁵⁷ Pines establishes his arguments, first, upon the discovery of new anti-Christian polemical texts in Arabic (and Judeo-Arabic) and in Hebrew. He shows how the understanding of Christianity in these texts reflects a Jewish Christian rather than an orthodox theology. Pines also points out how some of the concepts in these Arabic texts seem to be calques of terms used to describe Jewish Christianity by the Patristic heresiographers.⁵⁸

In a recent book, Fred Donner develops a controversial thesis on original Islam as an ecumenical movement which included monotheists from various denominations, former pagans, Jews and Christians, all “believing” in Muhammad's mission without abandoning their original faith and community.⁵⁹ According to him, earliest Islam represents an Arab nativist movement rallying around an Abrahamic monotheism, close to both Judaism and Christianity, whose existence had been ignored by most scholars.

From different angles, the hypothesis has been made of a pre-Islamic Abrahamic trend, i.e., one or a few religious groups perceiving themselves to be following in the spiritual footsteps of Abraham, and practicing the true religion which Abraham had discovered (or established). This religion would have been perverted by both Jews and Christians, who considered themselves

⁵⁵ Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*. See for instance his conclusion, on pages 150–1. Cf. Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans.”

⁵⁶ These articles are reprinted in Pines, *Collected Works: Vol. IV*.

⁵⁷ Pines' discovery triggered a virulent polemical response by Samuel Stern, who collaborated with Pines in analyzing the newly-discovered manuscript of 'Abd al-Jabbār. See Pines, *Jewish Christians*.

⁵⁸ See for instance Q 7.159, on a group (*umma*) of the Just among “Moses' people,” and Q 43.65 and 61.14, according to which a faction (*ṭā’ifa*) from the *Banū Isrā’īl* “believed,” while another one remained “unbelieving.” On the medieval Muslim authors discussing Jewish sects, see Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, chapter 4.

⁵⁹ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*. Donner's thesis has been strongly rejected by Patricia Crone, “Among the Believers.”

to be his [spiritual] offspring. Such a hypothesis would explain the Qur'anic allusions to "Abraham's religion" (*millat Ibrāhīm*). Even more than in the case of the Jewish Christians, our sources are here almost totally silent. In his *De Monogamia*, Tertullian, at the turn of the third century, had mentioned the existence of such a group. Sozomen, a fifth century ecclesiastical historian born in Palestine, describes in a famous passage the annual Abrahamic festival in Mamre, an international and inter-religious fair in which Jews, Christians as well as "Palestinians, Phoenicians, and Arabs" took part.⁶⁰ Sozomen writes elsewhere that the Arabs, having learned from the Jews about their Abrahamic roots, were practicing circumcision and abstaining from eating pork, as well as practicing a number of other Jewish rituals and customs.⁶¹ Sozomen's testimony has of course been noted by scholars, and in the last generation, a number of important studies have suggested a possible trajectory of Abrahamic rituals up to the birth of Islam, in particular those related to the Mecca sanctuary.⁶²

In late antiquity, Abraham was considered as a "culture hero" beyond the Jewish and Christian communities. For many pagans, his Babylonian origin made him the first astronomer. For both Jews and Christians, as Eusebius pointed out, Abraham was of course the first Hebrew patriarch (*Historia Ecclesiastica* I:4:5), as well as the inventor of true religion (*theosebeia*; ibid. I:4:9–10). Moreover, according to Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren, in the fifth and sixth centuries some Negev Arabs had been attracted by an "Abrahamic form" of monotheism, which expressed their ethnic identity, in other words, and Arab faith.⁶³ Nevo and Koren underline the frequent mention of the name Abraham in the Nessana documentary papyri. These late papyri, dating from the sixth and seventh century, were redacted in a community of Christian Arabs who, according to Nevo and Koren, may have previously developed an

60 Sozomène, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, II:4 (vol. I, 244–9 Sources Chrétiennes [306]). On this festival, see Kofsky, "Mamre." See also Fowden, "Sharing Holy Places."

61 Sozomène, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, VI:38:11 (vol. III, 242–6 Sources Chrétiennes [495]). Sebeos, an Armenian ecclesiastical historian writing in the second half of the seventh century, also mentions that the Arabs had learned from the Jews about their Abrahamic ascendancy (quoted by Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 187).

62 See in particular Nagel, "Der erste Muslim". Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, grant much importance to the figure of Abraham in the late antique background of Islam. See also Cook, *Muhammad*, 81: "This evidence [from Sozomen] is not lightly to be set aside... [Although there is] no evidence that would show any direct link between this early religion of Abraham and Muhammad's message... but it is at least a confirmation that Muhammad was not the first in the field..." On the late antique background of Islam, see also Al-Azmeh, *Rom, das Neue Rom und Bagdad*.

63 Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 189–90.

“Abrahamic” identity. Yet, Abraham is also common as a name in the Egyptian papyri of the fifth century.⁶⁴

The idea of a late antique Abrahamic religious movement, flourishing especially among the Negev Arabs, is certainly a plausible hypothesis, but not one that can be demonstrated in the present state of our knowledge. Such a movement would have been located on the margin of both Judaism and Christianity, just like Jewish Christianity. One might also point out the striking importance of Abraham in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, a text according to which Abraham was the first man to cross from ignorance to knowledge.⁶⁵

For a very long time, the Jewish tradition had insisted upon Abraham's versatility. According to *Genesis* 17.3–8, Abraham was both the ancestor of Israel and the father of “a multitude of peoples” – and not only the forefather of Ishmael's offspring. According to *Jubilees* (Chapter 9) and the Mishna (*Kiddushin* 4.14), Abraham had followed God's commandments before the promulgation of the Torah. Similarly, according to Philo, Abraham had followed God's ways before Moses had proclaimed the written Law (*agraphos physis; De Abrahamo* 275–6). Philo also notes elsewhere (*de Virt.* 216) that Abraham was the first man to have believed in God – an idea echoed by Paul, Philo's contemporary (*Romans* 4.1). In the footsteps of Pines and Dominique Urvoy, de Blois argues that the Qur'anic *hanif*, the gentile truthful to Abraham's religion, reflects a conception of Abraham as the father of a multitude of nations, i.e., of pagan *ethnes* (*goyyim*). The Syriac term for pagan, *hanpā*, would have undergone a semantic inversion in its passage to Arabic. The Qur'anic concept of *fīṭra*, original and primordial nature implanted in man by God (Q 30.30), also reflects true religion, and could well be related to the idea of *hanif*.⁶⁶ If this were the case, Abraham would have been neither a Jew nor a Christian. To be sure, this hypothesis on Islamic origins is different from the one insisting on the Jewish Christian origins of the Qur'ān. The two hypotheses, however, are based on the same hermeneutical principles, as they connect contemporary prophetic activism among the Arabs to the biblical tradition.

64 Cf. Millar, “Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus, and the Origins of Islam.” On the Nessana papyri, see Stroumsa, *People and Identities*. For another allusion to the “Abrahamic” dimension of earliest Islam, see the “Sarah fresco” at Quṣayr ‘Amra, which dates from the Umayyad period, and may reflect Sarah's identification with the Arabs. See Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 145–9.

65 Pseudo-Clement, *Recognitiones*, 1:33.

66 See Gobillot, *La conception originelle*.

Can we draw any conclusions from this rather disparate evidence? To my mind, it is probable that some Jewish Christian groups survived until at least the seventh century. The fact that such groups were probably not more than a few marginal communities does not really matter. Their ideas, unbearable for both rabbis and bishops, might well have appeared as a surprisingly attractive version of Christianity, at least for people living on the margins of the Byzantine Empire.⁶⁷ In particular, as surmised by Oscar Cullmann in 1930, the idea of the “true prophet” may certainly have survived in some circles. Such a possibility entails a significant reorientation of research on the origins of the Qur’ān. Henri Corbin has claimed that arguments about anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics in the Qur’ān often reflect a category mistake. For him, the Qur’ān cannot be either anti-Jewish or anti-Christian, as it is nothing but a Jewish Christian text. As is well known, Corbin often expressed himself in elliptic and hyperbolic terms, not always very usefully from an epistemological viewpoint. And yet, he was putting his finger on a remarkable phenomenon, to which we should devote all our attention. If a text like the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* preserves in Greek a phrase strikingly reminiscent of the Qur’ānic *shahāda*, the Jewish Christian track imposes itself as having offered an exceptional yeast, which allowed Muḥammad’s message to ferment in the rich humus of late antique religious traditions and attitudes. Jewish Christianity seems not only to have survived across the centuries, but also to have retained a really seducing power, and to have been a key element of what one can call *praeparatio coranica*.

It is to its heuristic utility that the Jewish Christian track owes its strength. Its significance, however, disappears as soon as the metaphor of source rather than that of yeast is being used. A number of reasons prevent us from considering Jewish Christianity as *the* source of Islam. The evidence is too sparse, the precise mechanisms through which ideas are transmitted are too little known. We know, as in the case of Manichaeism, that its influence was often indirect. Somewhat paradoxically, the essentially Jewish Christian idea of a chain of prophecy offered a model applicable to religious trends stemming from new cultural and ethnic milieus, for Muḥammad as well as for Mani. We do not deal here with a teleological vision of the history of religious ideas. Like any complex historical phenomenon, the birth of Islam is over-determined. Delimiting it too precisely risks over-simplifying reality, and freezes the essentially fluid interaction of ideas and sects. The mystery of the birth of a religion

67 See Crone, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” and “Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān.”

cannot be solved, and neither can the alchemical transformation of religious ideas, of their passage from fluid to solid state.

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A Note on the Relationship between *Tafsīr* and Common Understanding with Reference to Contracts of Marriage¹

Karen Bauer

One question about *tafsīr al-Qur’ān* is the extent to which interpretations in this genre reflect a common understanding of the Qur’ān, as opposed to a rarefied scholarly understanding of the text. Authors in the Classical period claimed to be writing for other scholars, their style is scholarly, and they used specific scholarly methods. But the earliest preserved works of *tafsīr* are written in a style that seems to reflect some elements of popular understanding, and early interpretations that are preserved in later works were often passed down through popular preaching. Such early works and interpretations are inconsistent in their use of the tools that would later become the hallmarks of the scholarly genre: grammatical analysis, citation of multiple, conflicting glosses, and explicit reference to *hadīths*; instead, interpretations in the earliest works often present one gloss as though it represents the author’s opinion, or a common understanding of the text.² And while Classical exegesis may have been written for scholars, it also broadly reflected social mores and common ideas.

One way of attempting to clarify the relationship between common understanding and the scholarly genre of *tafsīr* is to compare exegesis in works of *tafsīr* with that in other genres, particularly with genres that are not meant for a scholarly audience. This brief essay compares glosses on Q 2.228 in works of *tafsīr* and in the documentary evidence of preserved marriage contracts. I show that a particular phrase that appears in contracts also appears in works of *tafsīr*. In works of *tafsīr*, it is attributed to al-Dahhāk b. Muzāḥim al-Hilālī (d. 106/724), who was supposed to have been one of the transmitters of the

¹ I would like to thank Michael Cook and Behnam Sadeghi for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this article, and Asma Helali and Husain Qutbuddin for their generous help with electronic resources. Part of this essay is excerpted from Chapter 5 of my monograph *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses*, forthcoming.

² For more on the generic conventions in the Classical period see Calder, “Problems.”

tafsīr of Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/668).³ This paper suggests how a widespread and popular understanding of the ethical, decent, and proper relations between husband and wife was incorporated into both contracts and *tafsīr*.

An Early Interpretation of Q 2.228 in *Tafsīr* and Contracts

Q 2.228 describes divorce, and, according to some interpreters, marriage. It reads:

Women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, for three [monthly] courses. It is not lawful for them that they should conceal that which God has created in their wombs, if they are believers in God and the last day. And their husbands would do better to take them back in that case if they desire a reconciliation. Women have rights like their obligations according to what is right, and men have a degree over them (*lahunna mithlu ’lladhi ’alayhinna bi’l-ma’rūfi wa-lil rijāli ’alayhinna darajatun*). God is Mighty, Wise.

In the course of my research, I have analyzed over 60 pre-modern works of *tafsīr* on one of the phrases in this verse, “women have rights like their obligations according to what is right, and men have a degree over them.” That phrase consists of several elements. It includes a statement that women’s rights are like (*mithl*) their obligations. For the exegetes, this raised the question of whether women’s rights were the same as men’s or whether they were different; most chose the latter. According to Q 2.228, women’s rights and obligations are “according to what is right (*bi’l-ma’rūf*).” *Bi’l-ma’rūf* is a key phrase that brings propriety into the discussion of human relations in the Qur’ān. Michael Cook argues that the term is not necessarily technical or legal, but rather that it “seems to refer to performing a legal or other action in a decent and honourable fashion.”⁴ Finally, this part of Q 2.228 includes a statement that men have a “degree” over women, which the exegetes interpreted to include men’s rights and their innate superiority to women. For many exegetes, the statement of women’s rights and of men’s degree referred broadly to men’s position of responsibility towards their wives, granted by virtue of their power over them in the marital hierarchy, and the consequent ethical obligation to treat their wives well and preserve their rights.

3 For more on al-Dāḥḥāk, the paths of his transmission, and the oral and written transmission of early *tafsīr*, see Gilliot, “A Schoolmaster.”

4 Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 15.

An interpretation of Q 2.228 attributed to the early exegete al-Ḍahḥāk refers explicitly to the good treatment that the husband owes to his obedient wife and is quoted in many later works of exegesis. Here, he explains the phrase “women have rights like their obligations *bīl-ma'rūf*”:

When a woman obeys God and obeys her husband, then her husband is obligated to make companionship with her pleasant (*yuh̄sin suhbatahā*), refrain from harming her, and maintain her according to his means (*waynfiq 'alayhā min sa'atihi*).⁵

Al-Ḍahḥāk’s interpretation is representative of the majority of interpreters, according to whom men’s and women’s duties are different: a husband’s duty is to maintain his wife, be her companion, and refrain from harming her; the wife’s duty is to obey her husband.⁶ Echoing the language of Q 65.7, “let the man of means spend according to his means (*li-yunfiq dhū sa'atin min sa'atihi*)”, al-Ḍahḥāk says that a husband must maintain his wife in accordance with his wealth. For him, a wife’s obedience to her husband is comparable to her obedience to God, and wives’ rights are predicated on their obedience to God and to their husbands: if they do not obey, they may forfeit their rights to maintenance, companionship, and their husbands’ refraining from harming them. However, when a wife does obey, her husband must “make companionship with her pleasant (*yuh̄sin suhbatahā*).” The connection between *ma'rūf* and kindness (*ihsān*) is present in other verses of the Qurān.⁷

The idea of good companionship and providing for women “according to what is right” appears in about half of the interpretations of Q 2.228 surveyed here. The language used varies, but the root words are often the same. They stem from the following roots: *h*, *s*, *n*, *s*, *h*, *b*, *'sh-r*, and *bīl-ma'rūf*. The terms from the root *'sh-r* indicate fellowship, mixing or consorting with someone, or becoming close to them.

Following are some examples of interpretations of *bīl-ma'rūf* from the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. Ibn Wahb al-Dīnawarī (d. 308/920) uses the terms “good companionship and fellowship (*ihsān al-suhaba wa'l-mu'ashara*)”,⁸ while al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981) cites Q 4.19, which exhorts

⁵ Al-Ḍahḥāk, *Tafsīr*, 1:196 (at Q 2.228). This work is reconstructed from later sources, the earliest of which is al-Ṭabarī, who is the source for the interpretation cited here.

⁶ Only one interpreter is credited with an interpretation that gives men and women equal duties: Ibn 'Abbās says they must each adorn themselves for the other. See footnote 28.

⁷ Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 15. He cites Q 2.178, Q 2.229 and Q 2.236. Q 2.229 immediately follows the verse discussed in this article.

⁸ Ibn Wahb (attrib.), *al-Wādiḥ*, 1:75 (at Q 2.228).

men to consort with their wives according to what is right (*‘āshirūhunna bīl-ma’rūf*).⁹ Many exegetes cite al-Ḍahhāk specifically, using variations on his terms. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) summarizes the opinion of al-Ḍahhāk and others: “women are owed good companionship and fellowship according to what is right, like their obligation of obedience to their husbands in matters ordained by God (*lahunna ḥusn al-ṣuhba wa’l-‘ishra bīl-ma’rūf ‘alā azwājihinna mithl alladhbī ‘alayhinna lahum min al-tā‘a fīmā awjaba Allāh*).”¹⁰ Al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) cites al-Ḍahhāk as saying that women are owed good companionship and fellowship according to what is right (*ḥusn al-ṣuhba wa’l-‘ishra bīl-ma’rūf*);¹¹ al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) cites him as saying that women are owed good fellowship according to what is right (*ḥusn al-‘ishra bīl-ma’rūf*).¹²

Some exegetes extend husbands’ obligation to treat their wives kindly to the “degree” that men have over women. In his gloss on men’s “degree,” al-Ṭabarī goes so far as to say that the degree consists of men’s forgiving women if they fail to fulfill all of their duties. Al-Ṭabarī has Ibn ‘Abbās saying that the degree means that he likes to forgive his wife if she does not fulfill all of her duties towards him. For al-Ṭabarī, the degree is a “rank and a status (*rutba wa-man-zila*)” that men acquire when they manage women well. The marital hierarchy is the reason why husbands have power over their wives, but they are invited to use this power to be kind, generous, and forgiving towards them:

The best interpretation, in my opinion, is that of Ibn ‘Abbās, which says that the degree which God Almighty gives to men over women is that He puts the husband in a position to forgive his wife some of the duties enjoined upon her, disregarding them, while concurrently fulfilling all of his obligations towards her. And that is because God says *and men have a degree over them* following his statement that *women have rights like their obligations*, whereby He informed us that it is incumbent upon men not to harm women when they invoke their right of return after a revocable divorce, nor [should they harm them when exercising] their other rights. Likewise, it is women’s responsibility not to harm men by hiding their pregnancy from them, or [in exercising] their other rights. Therefore, God invites men (*nadaba*) to manage women magnanimously (*al-akhdhbī ‘alayhinna bīl-faḍl*) if they fail to fulfill some of the obligations towards their husbands that God enjoins upon them. And this is what

⁹ Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 1:442 (at Q 2.228).

¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 4:531 (at Q 2.228).

¹¹ Al-Māwardī, *Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, 1:292 (at Q 2.228).

¹² Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 3:353 (at Q 2.228).

Ibn ‘Abbās meant when he said, “I do not like to take advantage of all of my rights over my wife, because God Almighty says this in His words, *and men have a degree over them.*” The meaning of degree is a rank and status. [Although] this statement from God, exalted is He, is apparently a factual statement, its meaning is that men are invited to manage women magnanimously, so that they will have superior ranking to them.¹³

For al-Tabarī, “men have a degree over them” is apparently factual and descriptive, but in reality it is prescriptive: certain behaviors (men managing women generously) are the substance of the degree. Because men have a higher rank and better status than women, they are in the position to forgive their wives if the wives do not fulfill some of their duties. Thus, the marital hierarchy is preserved: it is men who are in the position to forgive. But for him the “degree” is taken as a statement of their moral obligations towards their wives, following on from the statement that women have rights and obligations *bil-ma’rūf*. When describing the degree, later interpreters tend to list the ways in which men were superior to women, but many interpretations nevertheless include an element of men’s moral obligation not to abuse their power over their spouses.

Husbands’ ethical obligations towards their wives are also recorded in marriage contracts. Though many of the extant contracts date from before the earliest extant instance of Dāḥḥāk’s interpretation (in al-Tabari’s *Tafsīr*), the language of contracts echoes that used in *tafsīr*. For this paper, I analyzed ten complete or near-complete contracts of marriage, spanning the period from 259/873 to 461/1069. All of them mention “good/pleasant companionship and fellowship” (*husn al-suḥba wa’l-mu’āshara*) or some variation of that formula. They use words found in both the Qur’ān and *tafsīr*. For instance, a document dated Rabi’ 1, 259/873, reads in part:

Ismā‘il, the freedman of Aḥmad b. Marwān, undertakes the obligation in respect of his wife Ḥiṣa, to fear God most High, through good companionship and fellowship (*taqwā Allāh Aẓūm bi-ḥusn al-suḥba wa’l-mu’āshara*), as God – mighty and sublime – has ordered and according to the *sunna* of Muḥammad, may the blessing of God be upon him and may He preserve him, to “keep them according to what is right, or let them go in kindness (Q 2.229).” Ismā‘il, freedman of Aḥmad, undertakes that

¹³ Al-Tabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 4:535–6 (at Q 2.228).

any woman whom he may marry besides his wife ‘Āisha bt. Yūsuf will be under ‘Āisha’s hand, to divorce as she wills.¹⁴

This contract uses terms found in the *tafsīr* of Q 2.228, *husn al-ṣuhba wa’l-mu’āshara* and an almost verbatim quotation from the following verse, Q 2.229, *imsāku bi-ma’rūfin aw tasrīhu bi-iḥsānin* (the contract includes this phrase but with the definite articles: *al-imsāk bī’l-ma’rūf aw al-tasrīh bī’l-iḥsān*). The husband’s moral responsibility to be nice to his wife is strengthened by mention of a specific condition: she has control over the divorce of any woman other than her whom he marries. It is fairly clear that this wife or her agnates, particularly her guardian (*walī*), were well aware of the nature of her husband’s rights over her and that they believed that some of the imbalance could be rectified in the marriage contract. Another contract, from 279/892, also mentions the husband’s responsibility not to harm his wife, and furthermore includes the conditions that she must be allowed to visit her family, she has control over the divorce of any woman whom he may marry other than her, and that she has control over dismissing any slave girl whom he may take.¹⁵ A third contract, dated Shawwāl 264/878, mentions that the husband should show his wife consideration and respect (*hasan nazāran*).¹⁶

The phrase *husn al-ṣuhba* was not the only formulaic element of the contracts. All of the contracts mentioned that men should “fear God” with respect to their wives. Some contracts also refer to the “degree” that men have over women in Q 2.228. One from the third/ninth century reads:

And it is his obligation to fear God – He is mighty and sublime – in respect of her and to make companionship with her pleasant (*wa-’alayhi an yattaqī Allāh ’azza wa-jal[la fīhā wa-yuḥsin suhbatahā bi]’l-ma’rūf*), as God – may He be blessed and exalted – has ordered in His book, and the example (*sunna*) of Muḥammad, His messenger – may the blessing of God be on him and on his family ... in what is incumbent upon him with regard to that, and one degree more (*fīmā ’alayhi min dhālikā wa-daraja zā’ida*), as God – may He be exalted – says: but men have a degree over them and God is almighty, wise [Q 2.228].¹⁷

¹⁴ Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, document 38, 1:68–9.

¹⁵ Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, document 41, 1:87–8.

¹⁶ Ibid., document 39, 1:74.

¹⁷ Ibid., document 42, 1:92–3.

In this contract, the husband must make his wife's life pleasing because of his degree over her. This echoes al-Tabari's interpretation of the degree. The degree is also mentioned in one of three marriage contracts published by Geoffrey Khan from the Cambridge Genizah collection; the contract in question is from 419–27/1028–36.¹⁸ Though the contract published by Khan is a century and a half later than that cited above, the wording is strikingly similar: in both, the husband has "one degree more (*daraja zā'ida*)" in terms of his rights over his wife; Khan cites two further instances of this phrase.¹⁹ These standard forms prevailed through time and stretched across confessional boundaries: the document published by Khan is probably for a Shī‘ī couple, as their names are ‘Ali b. Tāhir and Fātimah bt. Abī al-Hasan.

The presence of uniform elements in these contracts is because marriage contracts, like other Islamic contracts, were regulated. It was important for the contracting parties that their contract followed the correct forms: otherwise, the document might not have legal validity. Contracts were written by professional witnesses ('*udūl*). The institution of the professional witness arose "in order to avoid exposing written documents to the danger of invalidation to do the rejection of the suitability of the witness"; professional witnesses were certified by a judge and their testimony could not be rejected.²⁰ Some were also professional notaries who specialized in the writing of contracts.²¹

The branch of *fiqh* relating to these professional witnesses was called the *‘ilm al-shurūt*. Works of *shurūt* included formulas for contracts, and discussion of the legal issues involved; the authors of these works were judges.²² The oldest surviving work of *shurūt* is written by al-Tāhāwī (d. 321/933); but by his time, the field was well developed.²³ Khan has found that the majority of the Genizah purchase deeds from Fustāt in the fifth and sixth centuries are closer to the formulas recommended by Tāhāwī than those of other authors of *shurūt* literature;²⁴ so it is perhaps not surprising that Tāhāwī's formula for marriage contracts includes the key phrases discussed above. In his *Shurūt al-saghīr*, which was an abridgment of his *Shurūt al-kabīr* (now mostly lost), he includes

¹⁸ Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, 193 (document 32): *lahu ‘alayhā mithl alladhi lahā ‘alayhu min dhālika wa-daraja zā’ida*. For other instances of the formula *daraja zā’ida*, Khan cites APEL 42:6 (third century AH) and APEL 45:12 (461 AH).

¹⁹ Ibid., 193–4.

²⁰ Ibid., 7; also, Wakin, *The Function of Documents*, 7.

²¹ Ibid., 9.

²² Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, 7.

²³ Wakin, *The Function of Documents*, 15.

²⁴ Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, 51.

one complete sample marriage contract; several subsequent sections specify the changes to be applied in cases that differ in detail (if, for instance, the bride is not a virgin). The sample contract is for a pre-pubescent girl who marries a man who has attained puberty; an excerpt follows:

It is his duty to fear God – mighty and sublime – in respect of her, and to make companionship and fellowship with her pleasant according to what is right, as God – mighty and sublime – has ordered him in His book and in the *sunna* of His Prophet. And his rights over her after she reaches puberty are like those which she has over him in that regard, and he is obliged by one degree more (*wa-daraja zā'ida 'alayhi*).²⁵

The language in this sample contract is almost identical to the language in the actual contract from the third/ninth century cited above. The variations are slight: a few crucial words were lost from the actual contract, so we cannot know if it would have replicated every expression; the sample contract includes the words *ba'd bulūghihā*, indicating that the duties of the wife begin only after she attains puberty.

While it is certain that there is a relationship between sample and actual contracts, it is unclear which came first – whether the actual contracts were modeled on such samples (perhaps from al-Ṭahāwī himself) or whether he modeled his samples after current usage. Six of the actual contracts I studied were written within al-Ṭahāwī's lifetime: the first in 259/873 when he was between 20 and 30 years old (he was born between 229/843 and 239/853), and the sixth in 306/918, which was fifteen years before he died in 321/933. Wakin asserts that the *shurūt* literature arose from the documents: documents were formulated by the professional witnesses and the judges' desire to systematize this procedure gave rise to a body of *shurūt* literature.²⁶ Thus, according to Wakin, the manuals written by al-Ṭahāwī and others served to regulate current practice. Yet she also argues that al-Ṭahāwī's citation of earlier sources shows "a clear line of tradition for the drafting of written documents, going back several generations."²⁷

But what was the source of the phrases in the sample contracts? Al-Ṭahāwī does not tell us. The discussion following the sample contract centers on particular legal questions, such as the role of the guardian and the question of the

²⁵ Al-Ṭahāwī, *al-Shurūt al-saghīr*, 2:671.

²⁶ Wakin, *The Function of Documents*, 4.

²⁷ Ibid., 14.

bride's consent before puberty; the formulas seemed to be taken for granted rather than a source of disagreement or discussion.

The contracts are, of course, legal documents. But the source of these phrases does not seem to have been works of positive law. I conducted a cursory search for the terms *husn al-suḥba* and *yūhsin suḥbatāḥa* in works of *fiqh*, and found few results, with none from early works. One jurist who used the phrase was drawing it directly from *tafsīr* rather than precedent in *fiqh*. The Ḥanbali Ibn Qudāma (d. 630/1223) cites the interpretation of al-Ḍahḥāk almost verbatim as it is reported in al-Ṭabarī; it seems that he abridged a passage from al-Ṭabarī's interpretation of Q 2.228.²⁸ Ibn Qudāma's *Mughnī* is a commentary on the *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Khiraqī (d. 334/945–6); but al-Khiraqī's text does not include this *tafsīr*-based passage. His *Kitāb ‘Ishrat al-nisā’* focuses on precise legal questions, beginning with the question of fairness between wives when a man has more than one wife.²⁹ Unlike Ibn Qudāma, he does not speak of men's

²⁸ Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī*, 8:126 (*Kitāb ‘Ishrat al-nisā’ wa'l-khul'*), includes the following passage:

"Abū Zayd said, "Fear God concerning women, just as it is women's duty to fear God concerning men." Ibn 'Abbās said, "I like to adorn myself for my wife, just as I like it when she adorns herself for me, because God said, 'women's rights are like their duties *bil-ma'rūf*.'" Al-Ḍahḥāk said, in his interpretation of it, "When a woman obeys God and obeys her husband, then her husband is obliged to make companionship with her pleasant (*yūhsin suḥbatāḥa*) and refrain from harming her, and maintain her with his wealth."

The above passage seems to be an abridgment of the following passage from al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 4:531 (at Q 2.228):

"The interpreters differ in their interpretation of that. Some of them say its interpretation is that women are owed good companionship and fellowship according to what is right (*husn al-suḥba wa'l-iṣhra bi'l-ma'rūf*) from their husbands, just as it is their obligation towards their husband to obey concerning that which God has made obligatory for their husbands against them. The mention of those who say that:... on the authority of al-Ḍahḥāk concerning His words "women have rights like their obligations according to what is right," he said, "When a woman obeys God and obeys her husband, then her husband is obligated to make companionship with her pleasant (*yūhsin suḥbatāḥa*), refrain from harming her, and maintain her according to his means"... Ibn Zayd said, concerning His words "Women's rights are like their obligations according to what is right," "it is men's obligation to fear God concerning women, just as it is women's obligation to fear God concerning them." Others say the meaning of it is that women have rights over their husbands to adornment and good conduct, just as that is women's obligation over them. The mention of those who say that:... on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, "I like to adorn myself for my wife, just as I like it when she adorns herself for me, because God mentioned it in His words 'women's rights are like their obligations according to what is right.'"

²⁹ Al-Khiraqī, *Matn al-Khiraqī*, 108.

general obligation of kindness towards their wives. Though the evidence here is scant, we may draw a preliminary conclusion that al-Dahhāk's interpretation was primarily promulgated in the genre of *tafsīr*; it was then taken from that genre and cited elsewhere.

The methods and function of different genres of text have an effect on their content and this is another reason why a widespread understanding of the nature of marriage is found in *tafsīr* but is only rarely mentioned in works of positive law. Kecia Ali argues that, in early works of *fiqh*, marriage is compared to a transaction and jurists draw comparisons between wives and slaves.³⁰ Unlike the authors of *fiqh* cited by Ali, neither works of *tafsīr* nor marriage contracts analogize marriage to ownership, or wives to slaves. While analogy is a method that stands at the core of legal discussions, the specific legal analogies used in works of *fiqh* are not necessarily at the core of an ethical understanding of marriage.³¹ *Fiqh* is concerned with legal concepts; “being nice” is not a legal concept. Such vague ethical prescriptions are common, however, in works of *tafsīr*. The authors of *tafsīr* undertake linguistic analysis of the Qur'ān in a way that often explains, for them, the underlying ethical basis of the legal rulings; thus, they cite sources such as the *hadīth* of al-Dahhāk, which may have reflected a common notions of propriety and a common understanding of the nature of marriage.

The most obvious source for the phrase *husn al-ṣuhba* would be a *hadīth* on the authority of the Prophet, and it appears that *hadīths* do influence the language of marriage contracts. The phrase “fear God concerning women” seems to be a case in point: it is found in many *hadīths* and, in the contracts that I reviewed, the groom is ordered to “fear God concerning [his wife].” The notion of fearing God with regard to wives is widespread in the Qur'ān, but the exact phrase *attaqū Allāh fī... is not. For instance, Q 2.223 reads: “your wives are tilth to you, so approach your tilth how you will, but prepare yourselves, and fear God, and know that you are to meet Him in the hereafter.” The general prescription of fearing God is in the Qur'ān, but the exact wording from contracts may come from *hadīths*. In one contract, the link to *hadīths* is clear. This contract, from 444/1052, says “his duty is to fear Almighty God with respect to her, for she is with him as a trust from God”; these words are attributed to the Prophet in his farewell pilgrimage oration.³²*

The phrase *husn al-ṣuhba* also appears in *hadīths* on the authority of the Prophet. Because these *hadīths* do not deal with marriage or spousal relations,

³⁰ Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, 6.

³¹ Ibid., 7.

³² Khoury, *Papyrologische Studien*, 8.

they may not be the immediate source of the phrase on the contracts. However, the *hadīths* mentioning this phrase shed light on its meaning.

In *hadīths*, the phrase *husn al-ṣuhba* was associated with solicitousness, kindness, and caretaking, especially towards female relatives. The *hadīths* with the phrase are often found in the *Book of Good Conduct and Kinship* (*kitāb al-birr wa'l-sila*); they describe good conduct towards sisters, daughters, and parents.³³ In Lane's dictionary, a similar phrase implies protection: *aḥsana Allāh ṣahābataka* is translated as "May God make the guarding of thee good."³⁴ *Husn al-ṣuhba*, therefore, is more than the sum of its individual words. In other *hadīths*, *ṣuhba* alone has the straightforward meaning of "companionship."³⁵ But *husn al-ṣuhba* implies caretaking, protection, and solicitous regard.

Husn al-ṣuhba may be the Arabic expression of a non-Arabic formula for marriage contracts. There is overlap between the formula for Islamic contracts that emphasizes notions of companionship and fear of God and a Karaite contract from 1028 cited by Goitein. In that contract, the bridegroom promises to "conduct myself towards her with truthfulness and sincerity, with love and affection, I will not grieve or oppress her," while, in addition to her promises to listen to and obey her husband, the bride promises that she will be "his wife and companion, in purity, holiness, and fear of God."³⁶ Goitein notes that the notion of bride as companion is from Malachi 2:14, "yet she is thy companion." Because the Karaite contract post-dates many of the Islamic contracts, it is not clear whether Karaite formulas influenced, or were influenced by, Islamic formulas.

Though these phrases appear on a Karaite contract, they were not universal. The Jewish Geniza contracts analyzed by Friedman express similar sentiments but do not include the precise phrase as it is in Muslim contracts: the husband is obligated to "support and cherish" his wife, with some variations including clothing her, providing for her, and so forth, while the wife is

33 For instance, Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 2:503 (*Kitāb al-Birr*): "Whoever has three daughters or three sisters, or two daughters or two sisters, and makes companionship with them pleasant (*fa-aḥsana ṣuhbatahunna*), and fears God with respect to them (*wa'ttaqa Allāh fīhinna*), then he will attain heaven." A similar *hadīth* is in Ibn Ḥanbal, *Ruwāt al-Musnad*, 1:235–6. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:1974–5 (*Kitāb al-Birr, hadīths 1–4*) reads:

"A man came to the Messenger of God and said, 'Of all people, who is most deserving of my good companionship (*man ahaqq al-nās bi-husn al-ṣahābatī*)?' He said, 'Your mother.' The man said, 'then who?' He replied, 'Then your mother.' The man said, 'Then who?' He replied, 'Then your mother.' The man said, 'Then who?' He replied, 'Then your father.'

34 Lane, *Lexicon*, 1:1652 (root: *s- h- b*).

35 For instance in a *ḥadīth* found in the Ibn Māja's *Sunan*, a woman "prolonged her companionship (*tālat ṣuhbatahā*)."³⁶ Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, 1:635 (*Kitāb al-Nikāh, hadīth 1975*).

36 Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 3:50.

supposed to “honor and serve” her husband.³⁷ Thus in one of the contracts from Qugandima, Egypt, in the year 945, the husband promises to “nourish, provide for, clothe and cover, esteem and honor” his bride, Mubarka.³⁸ These sentiments resemble the sentiments in the Muslim contracts, and the question of the extent of the husband’s obligation to provide is discussed in Islamic law. But the exact formulas in the marriage contracts are distinct.

Conclusion: *Tafsīr*, Common Understanding, and Contracts of Marriage

To conclude, I will speculate on possible links between *tafsīr*, common understanding, and contracts of marriage. First, I would guess that the interpretation attributed to al-Ḍāḥḥāk, which includes the terms *husn al-ṣuhba* or *yuḥsin suhbatahā*, reflects more than the personal opinion of the supposed author. Instead, it puts into words a common understanding of the meaning of the verse. It is a convenient expression for propriety in marriage. There are three possibilities for the confluence between common understanding and the interpretation attributed to an authority: common understanding influenced him, common understanding is attributed to him, or common understanding is influenced by him. Gilliot describes the process of recording *tafsīr* in al-Ḍāḥḥāk’s lifetime in a way that highlights the informality of the mechanism by which interpretations were passed on, and the difficulty of knowing what the “master” really said. The quotation below shows how, in the recording and transmission of a work, a student may have added his own gloss or a common understanding:

An exegete would have delivered his exegesis (*tafsīr*) of the Qur’ān, or parts or passages of the Qur’ān, orally, during lectures. He may have had notebooks (*kitāb*, meaning here “writing,” in this case a notebook), to aid his memory. The pupils attending these lessons could learn the exegeses by heart and/or take notes in notebooks. One or more pupils (or an indirect pupil, that is a pupil of a pupil) could use this to “publish” a book (also *kitāb*). Of course the recensions of the master’s exegesis (*tafsīr*, not commentary as a finished or published book) could differ from one pupil to another, not only because they may have attended different lessons of the master, but also because they made selections in the material that

³⁷ Friedman, *Jewish Marriage*, 1:167–91.

³⁸ Ibid., 2:70.

they had written down and/or learnt by heart for the publication. Some of the pupils, or some of their own transmitters, could also partly modify parts of the content, according to their own theological orientation.³⁹

Early exegetes such as al-Dāḥḥāk were storytellers/popular preachers (*quṣṣāṣ*) as well as scholars and teachers within circles of learning; based on all of the available biographical evidence, Gilliot describes al-Dāḥḥāk as a storyteller, exegete, and schoolmaster. Al-Dāḥḥāk delivered lessons and sermons of *tafsīr*, but *tafsīr* as a genre was only nascent, and his interpretation entered into the genre of *tafsīr* by way of his students or their transmitters. But, as the quotation above highlights, the process of preservation can involve interpretation or interpolation on the part of the students who preserved the work of the early masters. Both oral and written transmission, therefore, introduce the possibility of new interpretations. So al-Dāḥḥāk himself may or may not have given the interpretation of *husn al-ṣuhba*, but once it was attributed to him, that attribution helped to preserve it in works of *tafsīr* for generations after.

Because the phrase *husn al-ṣuhba* was widespread, it may simply have occurred coincidentally in both marriage contracts and *tafsīr* pertaining to marriage. The evidence of a direct connection between *tafsīr* and contracts is slight, but tantalizing: several contracts link the phrase to Q 2.228, which is the verse linked with the phrase in *tafsīr*. So, to speculate still further, there is a chance that the phrase was associated with marriage through popular preaching or mosque lessons in *tafsīr*, which in turn influenced the professional witnesses who formulated the contracts. A connection could also work in the opposite direction. It may be that, as in works of *shurūt*, the common understanding was put in contracts first, and then influenced the interpretation of al-Dāḥḥāk or his students.

In an earlier article, I highlighted the scholarly ambitions of the authors of works of *tafsīr*. In the introductions to their works, the exegetes claimed that their audience was highly scholarly, that common people could not understand them, and that short versions of *tafsīr* were merely for the base reader.⁴⁰ The evidence regarding the roots of *tafsīr* in popular preaching, and as a record of common understanding, shows their assertions in a different light. The repeated protestations about the scholarly importance and general incomprehensibility of their work may have been an attempt to combat the image of *tafsīr* as a record of popular opinion and preaching, rather than of

39 Gilliot, "A Schoolmaster," 314.

40 Bauer, "The Muslim Exegete."

sound *hadīths* and scholarly reasoning. In *tafsīr*, perhaps the division between “popular” and “scholarly” was not so marked after all.

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“Earnest Money” and the Sources of Islamic Law

Gerald Hawting and David M. Eisenberg

One of the most important areas of research to which Professor Crone’s work has contributed is that of the sources of Islamic law. In her study of the origins of the legal institution whereby outsiders were incorporated into early Islamic society (the institution of *walā’*), she argued that its main source was neither pre-Islamic Arab custom nor Roman law proper, but rather the provincial law and practice of those regions that came under Arab Muslim control, having previously been influenced by Hellenistic and Roman law and culture. In those regions there was what she describes as “a legal *koinē* – a way of regulating things, usually of Greek or ancient Near Eastern origin, which was known to and understood throughout the provinces which were to form the heartlands of Islam.” Furthermore, “...it is tempting to speculate that it was this *koinē* which came to form the substratum of the Shari‘a.”¹

This contribution to a volume in her honor discusses another ingredient of Roman and provincial law and practice which was known to early Islamic jurisprudents. It has long been recognized that the form of contract known variously in Arabic as *bay’ al-‘urbān/urbūn/arabūn/arabūn* (initial *hamza*), etc.,² is related to the institution known in Greek and Latin as *arrhabōn* and *arrha*. Professor Crone herself referred to it in passing as “another Near Eastern institution which influenced Justinian’s law.”³ Here we examine the discussion of this contract by some early Muslim scholars and then consider their discussions in the light of other evidence regarding it.

1 Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, 92–3.

2 For various spellings, see Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. ‘arabūn/‘urbūn/urbān; Ibn al-Athīr, *Nihāya*, 3:202. Some derive the word from Arabic: al-Bājī, *Muntaqā*, 4:157, cites Ibn Ḥabib (presumably Yūnus, d. 182/798) as saying, *al-‘urbān awwalu al-shay’ wa-‘unufwānuhu* (“it is the beginning and prime part of a thing”). Ibn al-Athīr, *Nihāya*, 3:202, connects it with the idea of expressing something in an explicit and clear way (*īrāb*). Others recognize that it must be of non-Arabic origin. For simplicity, the form ‘arabūn will be used for the Arabic here, unless citing a source using a different one.

3 Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, 93, with reference to Buckland, *A Text-Book of Roman Law*, 48if.

Bay‘ al-‘arabūn in Islamic Law

The best-known Islamic references to the contract known by this name are citations of a *hadīth* in which the Prophet is reported to have prohibited it (*nahā rasūl Allāh (ṣ) ‘an bay‘ al-‘urbān*). In al-Laythī’s recension of the *Muwaṭṭa’*, Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) cites the *hadīth* and provides an account of his understanding of the institution.⁴

Mālik understands it as a contract, whether for the purchase of goods (his example is a slave) or of services (his example is the hire of a riding animal). At the time of the contract, the buyer or hirer pays a non-refundable sum to the vendor, who agrees to supply the goods or the service at a future date. In the event that the purchaser withdraws from the purchase or hire, the sum is to be kept by the vendor.⁵ In the event that the contract is fulfilled, the sum is to be counted as part of the agreed price, and is thus deducted from what the purchaser owes. Other accounts do not go much beyond Mālik’s explanation.⁶ What seems relatively clear: the contract involves the payment on the part of the buyer of a non-refundable deposit or guarantee.⁷ The English expression most often used to refer to the initial payment in discussions of this sort of agreement is “earnest money.”⁸

4 Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’*, recension of al-Laythī, *K. al-Buyū‘*, no. 1. From Mālik the *isnād* runs: someone counted as reliable (*al-thiqā ‘indahu*) > ‘Amr b. Shu‘ayb > his father > his grandfather. See too Abū Dā‘ūd, *Sunan*, *K. al-Ijāra*, 33, and Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, *K. al-Tijārāt*, no. 22 (*bāb bay‘ al-‘urbān*). Both cite the *hadīth* from Mālik with the same *isnād*. See further, Juynboll, *Canonical Hadith*, 340. Juynboll’s translation of the prophetic prohibition (“the Prophet forbade the selling of an earnest”) is misleading as to the issue concerned.

5 In later jurisprudence the down payment would in such a case be characterized as a gift, although this concept is absent from the *hadīth* under consideration. See, e.g., Zuhayli, *Financial Transactions in Islamic Jurisprudence*, 1:99.

6 Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, *K. al-Tijārāt*, 22, no. 2: *Al-‘urbān* is that a man buys a riding animal (*dābba*) for 100 dinars and he gives him [i.e., the seller] two dinars as an *arbūn*, saying, “If I do not buy the animal, then the two dinars are yours”; Abū Dā‘ūd, *Sunan*, *K. al-Ijāra*, 33, no. 1, which paraphrases the account of the *Muwaṭṭa’*; Bayhaqi, *Al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 5:342, citing the *Muwaṭṭa’* account; Ibn al-Athir, *Nihāya*, 3:202: someone buys a commodity (*sil‘a*) and gives something to the owner on condition that, if he completes the sale, the sum is counted as part of the price and, if not, it belongs to the owner and the prospective purchaser cannot ask for it back.

7 Mālik prefacing his explanation with the phrase, “In our view, but God knows best, that is... (*wa-dhālik fīmā narā wa-‘llāhu a‘lamu*).” “God knows best” is probably here a pious qualification of his presumption in putting forward his own view, rather than an indication of his uncertainty.

8 According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, the English “earnest” in this sense (to be distinguished from its homonym meaning “serious” or “zealous”) is derived from the Old French *erres*, and thus ultimately from the Semitic ‘-r-b via Latin *arrha*.

Mālik's account leaves a number of questions unanswered. Possible answers to them might be gleaned from later commentators on the *Muwatta'* and others, or from a more detailed examination of what Mālik himself is reported to have said in other reports that are included in the chapter *Mā jā'a fī bay' al-'urbān*. Before coming to that, however, it is important to indicate that the negative attitude expressed in the prophetic prohibition of *bay'* *al-'urbān* was not shared by all, even though some of the statements in academic literature appear to claim that Islamic law rejected it entirely.⁹ It seems, in fact, to have been the subject of different opinions (*ikhtilāf*) in early Islam and subsequently between the Mālikīs and the Ḥanbalīs.¹⁰

In his *Nihāya*, Majd al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 606/1210) reports that Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) allowed contracts involving the payment of earnest money on the basis of a report that Ibn 'Umar permitted it and, furthermore, because the *isnād* of the *ḥadīth* prohibiting it is interrupted (*munqati'*).¹¹ Ibn al-Athīr also tells us that a report about the caliph 'Umar's approval of this type of contract also lies behind Ibn Ḥanbal's position. According to that report, 'Umar's governor of Mecca bought a house for use as a prison, agreeing a price of 400,000 (presumably dirhams): "and they paid 400 in advance (*wa-a'rabū fīhi arba'mi'a ya'nī aslafū*)."¹² From that it is obscure whether the use of the verb *a'raba* represents Ibn al-Athīr's own attempt to present the report in a way relevant to the issue of the *'urbān* (which he discusses as one of the strange words, *gharib*, of the *hadīths* needing clarification) or whether it was part of the original wording of the report. Other citations of the report suggest that it did not originally contain any word derived from the root *'-r-b-*.

⁹ E.g., Schacht, *Introduction*, 9, n. 1: "... notwithstanding the great antiquity of the institution in the laws of the Near East, [it] is attested in Arabic not earlier than the second century of the hijra, when the institution was rejected by Islamic Law."

¹⁰ According to Vogel and Hayes, *Islamic Law and Finance*, 157, the Ḥanbalīs are the only *madhhāb* to uphold the validity of the *'arabūn*. So, too, Nethercott and Eisenberg, *Islamic Finance*, 221. Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) says (*Bidāya* 3:1223) that the majority of the *'ulamā'* *al-amṣār* held it to be illicit, while a group of the *tābi'ūn* are reported to have allowed it. The names of the latter that he gives are those referred to by Ibn Abī Shayba – for which, see below. With the aim of adapting the commercial rules of the *Shari'a* to the requirements of modern finance, contemporary jurists have become more approving of this transaction, provided that a time limit is fixed for the exercise of the option. Representative of this trend is Islamic Fiqh Academy (Jeddah) Resolution No. 72/3/8 concerning Down Payment Sale (Earnest Sale) (21–27 June 1993).

¹¹ For different views on the transmission of 'Amr b. Shu'ayb from his father, from his grandfather, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 8:51.

¹² Ibn al-Athīr, *Nihāya*, s.v. *'-r-b-*, cited by Heffening "Tidjāra," *EI*².

The significance of the tradition about ‘Umar’s governor is not all that clear in Ibn al-Athīr’s summary of it, but it is presented more fully in a chapter headed *Fī al-‘urbān fī al-bay’* in the *Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849). There the full names of the various participants are provided and it is made clear that the down payment of 400 dirhams was paid while the vendor and purchaser waited to see whether the caliph himself would approve of the purchase. We are specifically told that if ‘Umar agreed to it, the sale would go ahead, if not, then the 400 would belong to the vendor. The root ‘-r-b does not occur in the report itself, but Ibn Abī Shayba or his editor understood it to be relevant to the issue of ‘arabūn, since it is listed together with other reports on that topic.¹³

The same chapter of the *Muṣannaf* also contains the report about Ibn ‘Umar alluded to by Ibn al-Athīr. Ibn ‘Umar’s son reports that his father had been present when some bartering about clothes was taking place and he did nothing to show his disapproval when the custom of a down payment of one dirham was followed.¹⁴ Again there is no explicit use of a form of the word ‘arabūn.

This chapter of the *Muṣannaf* in fact contains reports displaying a variety of attitudes toward *al-‘urbān fī al-bay’*, many of them using forms of the word. Most notable are two (both on the authority of Zayd b. Aslam) that the Prophet himself declared the procedure licit. In other words, they flatly contradict the more widely circulated report that the Prophet forbade it.¹⁵ In addition we have a report that Mujāhid did not think there was anything wrong with it (*lā yarā... ba’san*).¹⁶

Other reports in this section pose some problems of interpretation. Sa‘īd b. Maysara thought that no earnest money (‘arabūn/‘urbūn) should be paid in the case of [contracts concerning] fat (*wadak*), fodder (‘alaf) or food (*ta‘ām*) – or in other things (*fi ghayrihinnā*).¹⁷ Whether that last phrase implies a general disapproval of earnest money, or whether we should understand it to mean something like “or in other comparable things” is not clear, but it seems to make more sense if understood in the latter meaning.

¹³ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 7:306 (no. 3252). On Ibn Abī Shayba and his work, transmitted and compiled by the Andalusi Baqī b. Makhlad (d. 276/889), see Lucas, “Where are the Legal *Hadīth*?” 283–314.

¹⁴ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 7:305 (no. 3250): *Kunnā natabāyi‘u bi-l-thiyāb bayna yaday Abdi ‘llāhi bni ‘Umar man iqtadā iqtadā bi-dirham fa-lā ya’murunā wa-lā yanħānā*.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7:304ff. The reports in which the Prophet explicitly says that the contract is licit are nos. 3246 and 3251 (*aħħalla al-‘urbān fī al-bay’*).

¹⁶ Ibid., 7:305 (no. 3248).

¹⁷ Ibid., 7:305 (no. 3247).

Two reports about Ibn Sīrīn tell us that he did not think there was anything wrong with ‘urbūn/‘arabūn and in the purchaser telling the vendor that he could keep the money if he did not complete the purchase. One of them refers to “salt and other things,” the other to the hire of a house or a ship.¹⁸ The only report here that expresses a clear general disapproval is the last one in the chapter, which tells us that ‘Atā’ and Ṭāwūs disapproved (*karihā*) *al-‘urbān fī al-bay’*.¹⁹

A preliminary consideration of Ibn Abī Shayba’s chapter suggests, first, that there was more debate about *bay’ al-‘arabūn* in early Islam than is evident from previous academic literature; secondly, that the issue was not simply for or against it in general terms, but that the nature of the goods being sold or hired (although none of the reports refer to hire) could affect the issue; thirdly, that the reports might reflect regional differences. The two transmissions of the prophetic *hadīth* approving of the contract seem to have predominantly Iraqi transmission,²⁰ while that expressing general disapproval (by Atā’ and Ibn Ṭāwūs) is Meccan or Hijāzī.²¹

The report that Ibn Ḥanbal allowed the ‘arabūn contract may be amplified a little by a chapter on that issue in the version of the *Masā’il Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal* transmitted by his son ‘Abd Allāh.²² That chapter too has the report about ‘Umar’s governor of Mecca. Three points seem to stand out from the chapter. First, the degree of approval expressed by Ibn Ḥanbal seems quite limited, even allowing for the terse way in which his answers are recorded. Asked what he thought about the tradition about ‘Umar’s governor who made a down

¹⁸ Ibid., 7:305–6 (nos. 3249, 3253).

¹⁹ Ibid., 7:307 (no. 3254).

²⁰ Zayd b. Aslam, the transmitter from the Prophet, was a Badrī, who is variously said to have been killed during the Ridda wars or still alive and fighting on the side of ‘Alī at Šiffīn. According to the relevant entries in al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, regarding those named as transmitters after Zayd, Hishām b. Sa‘d was a *mawlā* of Quraysh or Makhzūm, sometimes known as Yatīm Zayd b. Aslam. Many, including Ibn Ḥanbal, had a low opinion of him as a transmitter. No place of death is given for him, but he is said to have died c. 160/776–7. Muḥammad b. Bishr, who transmitted the *hadīth* from him, is presumably Muḥammad b. Bishr b. al-Furāṣīfa, a Kufan said to have died in 203/818–19. In the other tradition the transmitter from Zayd b. Aslam was Mu‘tamir b. Sulaymān, who died in Baṣra in 187/803. Perhaps the prophetic saying in favor of the contract fell out of circulation because of the poor quality of the *isnāds* attached to it.

²¹ The differences cannot be explained purely on regional lines, however, since Mujāhid, a Meccan authority, is cited in an *isnād* containing Ibn ‘Uyayna as seeing no problem with the ‘urbān contract.

²² Ibn Ḥanbal, *Masā’il*, *rīwāyat ibnihi ‘Abd Allāh*, 280.

payment on the prison house, he says simply, “That’s alright (*da’ḥā*).” Secondly, no reasons are given – whether practical or to do with the theory of the bases of the law – for his position. His hardly enthusiastic acceptance of the contract is presented simply as a decision, but that too merely reflects the nature of this text, which contains questions to the imam and his short answers. Thirdly, it is notable that most of the chapter deals with immovable property – the buying or renting of house – and there is nothing that discusses the sale of movable property or makes any explicit differentiation between various types of goods in the way that some of Ibn Abī Shayba’s reports do.

Discussion of the Islamic Material

One thing missing from the Islamic material summarized above is any clear or explicit statement about why contracts involving the payment of earnest money are rejected as invalid or accepted as valid, beyond the appeal to authoritative sources. Mālik is shown to have rejected them on the grounds of a prophetic *hadīth* to that effect; Ibn Ḥanbal accepted them because the *hadīth* had an imperfect *isnād* and because he knew of reports that ‘Umar and his son had accepted them. In the case of Mālik, at least, that does not seem enough. He did not always follow prophetic precedent when it conflicted with another possible source (such as the accepted practice of Medina), and it is possible that he even knew of the *hadīth* cited by Ibn Abī Shayba saying that the Prophet regarded such contracts as licit.²³ It seems likely, therefore, that there is some more fundamental reason for the position he takes.

Later sources tend to focus on the concept of risk (*gharar*) as the explanation for the opposition to contacts in which an ‘*arabūn* is given. According to al-Bājī (d. 474/1081), the Prophet forbade it because of its clear risk (*lī-annahu min abyān al-mukhāṭara*).²⁴ Ibn al-Athir and al-Zurqānī (d.1122/1710) include risk together with other objections: they say that the *fuqahā’* explain the Prophet’s prohibition of this type of contract on the grounds of its lack of

²³ That *hadīth* was circulated on the authority of Zayd b. Aslam, who is frequently cited in the *Muwaṭṭa’*.

²⁴ Al-Bājī, *Muntaqā*, 4:157–8. That aversion to risk is a prime reason for the aversion to *bay’ al-‘arabūn* is supported too by al-Bājī’s comment (*ibid.*, 4:157) that the contract would be valid if the earnest money were returned to the prospective purchaser or hirer in the event that it was not completed, because then no risk (*khaṭar*) is involved.

certainty, its risk, and (the possibility that) it leads to the fruitless expenditure of wealth (*fihi min al-shart wa-l-gharar wa-akl amwāl al-nās bi-l-bātil*).²⁵

That seems reasonable: the prospective purchaser or hirer is giving away his own property, with no prospect of getting it back, for the future delivery of something that might prove to be different from what he expected or might not be delivered at all. On the other hand, from the point of view of the vendor, the price of what he has agreed to supply might increase significantly between the time the contract was made and the time of delivery. Those perishables (fat, fodder, food) mentioned in the reports of Ibn Abī Shayba, and salt which is also referred to, might be thought especially liable to sharp and frequent variations in price.²⁶ In theory there is the possibility of risk for both parties to the contract.²⁷

On the other hand, it could be that Ibn Ḥanbal's acceptance of the payment of earnest money as valid for the purchase or hire of immovable property reflects a lower degree of risk in such transactions. The property would be inspected by the prospective buyer or hirer at the time of the contract, and the price would probably not be subject to the same rate of fluctuation as that of perishables.

However, if one examines the content of the other reports about Mālik's views in al-Laythī's recension of the section of the *Kitāb al-Buyū'* headed *Mā jā'a fī bay' al-'urbān*, it is less clear that the underlying concern was that it involved unacceptable risk. None of those reports in fact mention the

²⁵ Al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ*, 3:250; Ibn al-Athīr, *Nihāya*, 3:202, uses the same phrase but does not have the final part about the futile consumption of people's wealth. The same three elements are repeated as the basis for the prohibition by Ibn Rūshd and in other works that attempted to systematize what was a manifestly inconsistent body of legal doctrine.

²⁶ The reference to salt calls to mind the special concern with this and certain other commodities – including barley, dates, gold, silver, and wheat – that is central to the legal doctrine surrounding *ribā*, famously expressed in the so-called “six commodities *ḥadīth*”, on which see Nethercott and Eisenberg (eds.), *Islamic Finance*, 213, and the sources cited therein. It is additionally interesting because it is referred to also in material pertaining to this type of contract from outside Islam, for example in a passage of the Babylonian Talmud referred to below.

²⁷ Other possible reasons why this type of contract might be disapproved of in classical Islamic law might be because it combines binding (*lāzim*) and non-binding (*jā'iż*) contracts, because it adds an additional condition (*shart*) to the standard sale contract, because of the possibility of unjust enrichment, because it involves gambling (*maysir*), and because of the indefinite nature of the obligation to complete the transaction. See Vogel and Hayes, *Islamic Law and Finance*, 156–7.

‘urbān.²⁸ The other five relatively lengthy and detailed reports under that heading insist, first, that goods exchanged for each other in a contract to be fulfilled at a future date should be of equivalent value; secondly, that the contract, having been concluded, should not subsequently be added to by a later agreement between the parties in a way that would give one of them a material or financial advantage compared with the original contract.

One wonders if the *hadīth* about the *bay’ al-‘urbān* has been included here because that type of contract was regarded as liable to the same sort of abuses that the other five reports show Mālik concerned to prevent. They are portrayed as abuses because they involve the unjustified enrichment of one party at the expense of the other, and perhaps are associated with the idea of *ribā* (usury), although that term is not attributed to Mālik at this point. Mālik’s example of how someone might exploit a contract of sale in order to enrich himself illegitimately is especially interesting:

Regarding a man who sells a slave-girl to another for 100 dinars [to be paid] at a time in the future, and then buys her back for a greater amount than that for which he had sold her, [to be paid] at a time later than that agreed when she was sold, that is not right (*lā yaṣlaḥū*). The explanation (*tafsīr*) of what is disapproved in it is this: he sells the slave-girl [for an amount to be paid] at a certain time, and then buys her back on condition that [he pays] at a later time. [Say,] he sells her for 30 dinars [to be paid] in a month, and then buys her back for 60 dinars [to be paid] in a year or half a year, the result is that his goods return to him just as they had left him (*bi-‘aynihā*), but his partner has given him 30 dinars [to be paid] in a month in exchange for 60 dinars [to be paid] in a year or half a year. That is not right (*lā yanbaghī*).²⁹

Although the word usury (*ribā*) is not used, this complex transaction looks like a form of double sale, a classic ruse (*hīla*) designed to get around the religious prohibition of usury. In effect, the owner of the slave has borrowed 30 dinars to be repaid doubled at a later date. Although none of these further five reports mentions the paying of any earnest money (indeed they appear to envisage

²⁸ It seems that neither al-Shaybānī’s recension of the *Muwaṭṭa’* nor Saḥnūn’s *Mudawwana* refers explicitly to *bay’ al-‘urbān*. When the relevant material was inserted into al-Laythī’s recension and whether Mālik himself associated it with the reports that now follow it are questions we leave to one side.

²⁹ Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’, riwāya* of al-Laythī, *Mā jā’ā fī bay’ al-‘urbān* at the end.

that the purchaser pays the whole of the agreed price at a date agreed when the contract is made), the fact that the material about the *bay‘ al-‘urbān* is presented together with them, and that it provides the heading for the whole section, suggests that contracts involving the payment of earnest money were similarly understood to offer the opportunity of unethical enrichment.

It may be, then, that although in later Islamic legal texts the *‘arabūn* is often disapproved of because it is associated with the concept of risk (*gharar*), that rationale is a later development after the time of Mālik. If, in his time, it was an aversion to unjustifiable personal enrichment that was the dominant motive for suspicion of the *bay‘ al-‘urbān*, that would be of some significance for understanding why a type of contract which was generally accepted before and outside Islamic law came to be rejected by many Islamic jurists.³⁰

This association of the *‘arabūn* with the possibility of usury also seems to have been shared by Schacht. In his article s.v. “*Hila*” in *EI*², he refers to *bay‘ al-‘urbān* as a form of “double sale” (*mukhāṭara*, or *īna*): a *hīla* for getting around the ban on usury, in which the prospective debtor sells something to the prospective creditor and immediately buys it back for a higher price to be paid at a specified date in the future. Schacht gives no source for his identification here of the *bay‘ al-‘urbān* as a *hīla* and in his references elsewhere to contracts involving the payment of non-refundable earnest money he does not portray them in that light. Possibly, his understanding here reflects the context in which the contract is discussed in the *Muwatṭa‘*, or perhaps he has other more explicit attestations.³¹

It seems clear, at least, that the view that contracts involving the payment of earnest money are illegitimate reflects the application of ethical principles to them. They are understood to make it possible that one party to the contract benefits unfairly at the expense of the other.

Why would a purchaser ever be willing to give earnest money, with apparently no prospect of its return, for goods to be delivered at a future date? As we have noted, the Islamic material is reticent about what happens if the

³⁰ It is true that the word *gharar* is used by Mālik in one of the reports about his views in the chapter on *bay‘ al-‘urbān*. However, he does not refer to *gharar* in his discussion of that contract and when he does use the word it seems to be in a non-technical way: he says that when a pregnant slave-girl is sold, it is not permissible to exclude the child in her womb from the agreed price on the grounds that, so many things being unknown about it, the sale involves risk (*lī-anna dhālik gharar*).

³¹ Neither, Santillana, *Sommario del diritto malechita*, 202, §62, nor Heffening, “*Tidjāra*,” *EI*², connect *bay‘ al-‘arabūn* with the *Hyal*. See too Lohlker, *Der Handel im mālikitischen Recht*, 34, n. 2, whose description follows that of Heffening.

contract fails because the vendor withdraws from it. We are told that the purchaser loses the earnest money if he withdraws, but not what happens to the earnest money if the vendor reneges. One might speculate that the latter was not seen as a strong possibility. Perhaps one point of the payment of the earnest was to secure for the purchaser a right of refusal if he found, when they were delivered, that the goods he had bought or hired were not of the type or quality that he had expected. The right of refusal would be restrained, however, by his willingness to stand the loss of the earnest money.

Another possibility is that the payment of the earnest ensures the right to complete the purchase or hire and to prevent the goods being sold or leased to anyone else. That is what Ibn al-Athīr tells us.³² Evidently, it must have been thought worthwhile to risk (perhaps a relatively small) payment of earnest money in order to have the right to decide whether to go forward with the contract or to withdraw from it. However, the possibility that the purchaser (or perhaps the vendor) might subsequently decide not to complete the sale or hire seems to indicate that the payment of earnest money does not signify a transfer of title.

All of the material discussed here envisages the earnest money as consisting of money – not goods in kind – and as a relatively small amount. We have seen that Mālik is quite vague about the amount, but the tradition about ‘Umar’s governor envisages a payment of 0.1%: 400 dirhams on a price of 400,000.

In general, it seems that the material on *bay’ al-‘urbān* in the sources discussed here leaves open several questions and gives the impression of treating only certain aspects of what is quite a complex matter. On the one hand we have prophetic statements both forbidding and allowing the contract in absolute terms, on the other we have reports that discuss its validity for some types of property but not for others. The treatment of the issue is not systematic and the positions stated – whether for or against, whether allowing it for some goods but not others – are not really explained on rational or formal grounds. The exception to that is the tendency in later sources to explain its rejection on the grounds of the uncertainty and risk that is involved, but that, of course, begs the question why those who allow it are not worried by the infringement of that principle.³³

³² Ibn al-Athīr, *Nihāya*, 3:302.

³³ In reality, of course, risk was unavoidable in everyday economic activity: see, e.g., J. D. Latham, “Salam,” in *EI*². For the prophetic prohibition of *gharar*, see Nethercott and Eisenberg, eds., *Islamic Finance*, 45–6.

Non-Islamic Evidence

The payment of earnest money, and similar practices, are well attested before and outside Islam, and often they are referred to by words connected with the Semitic root ‘r-b and Greek *arrhabōn*. The same and related practices sometimes involve a different vocabulary, but often elicit the terms we are concerned with in this paper. It is not always easy to decide what practice a particular word indicates.

For example, in Islam there is the *rahn*, which is mentioned in the Qur’ān. Q 2.282 emphasizes the importance of recording a debt (*dayn*) in writing, but Q 2.283 allows that, when on a journey and no scribe (or, in some readings, writing materials) can be found, then the debtor may deposit *rihān maqbūda* with the creditor.³⁴ This seems likely to be a security for the payment of the debt, like the *pignus* of Roman law or the *habōl/’abōt* of the Torah,³⁵ terms that, like *arrhabōn*, are often translated as pledge.

However, since, when someone makes a contract to buy or hire something and does not immediately pay the agreed price in full, he may be envisaged as being in the position of debtor to the vendor, there is clearly the possibility of some overlap between the *rahn* as *pignus* and as *arrha*. In his translation of Q 2.282, Yusuf Ali renders *tadāyana* as “to deal with each other,” implying that the two parties are involved in a business transaction, and Schacht saw *rihān* in Q 2.283 as an Arabic alternative for the foreign word *’arabūn*.³⁶

The potential for overlap is also evident in what for many people is the best known text containing the Hebrew *’eravōn*, the story of Judah and Tamar in *Genesis* 38. There we are told that, in exchange for sexual relations, Judah agreed to give Tamar a kid from his flock and, as a pledge (*’eravōn*; 38.17–18)

34 On Q 2.282–3, see now Leicht, “The Commandment of Writing Down Loan Agreements.”

35 For the *pignus*, see e.g., Lee, *Elements of Roman Law*, index. For *Habōl*, see, e.g., Exodus 22.25, and for *’abōt*, Deuteronomy 24.10.

36 Schacht, *Origins*, 186, discusses earnest money but makes no explicit reference to *’arabūn*, etc. Instead, he discusses it in connection with the word *rahn*, “security” which he says meant “a kind of earnest money which was given as a guarantee and material proof of a contract, particularly when there was no scribe available to put it into writing.” Schacht says further that the institution of earnest money was not recognized by the ancient schools of law, and here he clearly has the *’arabūn* in mind since he refers to Zurqāni’s commentary on the passage in the *Muwatṭa’* where Mālik cites the prophetic prohibition of the payment of earnest money in a contract. A further indication of his equation of Qur’anic *rahn* with non-Qur’anic *’arabūn* is his statement that, “The foreign origin of this doctrine [viz. the rejection of the *’arabūn*] which neglects old Arab usage and an explicit passage in the Koran, is probable.”

that he would fulfill his promise, he gave her his “seal (ring) and cord and staff.”³⁷ Following their union, when Judah tried to deliver the kid and *get back his pledge*, he could not find Tamar. She had become pregnant with twins and, after giving birth, was called a harlot. Judah, not recognizing her, was about to burn her alive, but when she said that it was the owner of the seal, cord, and staff who had made her pregnant, Judah realized who she was and acknowledged he was the father. In the Septuagint, the Hebrew ‘eravōn is translated by the Greek *arrhabōn*.³⁸

Here the ‘eravōn clearly functions as a pledge that Judah will pay Tamar the agreed price, but, unlike the ‘arabūn of Islamic times, it is not part of the price and is to be returned when the price is paid. Furthermore, one assumes that the object of the sale – sexual intercourse – was delivered almost immediately. The ‘eravōn here, then, is something like a surety for a debt.³⁹ As has already been noted, in other passages the Hebrew Bible uses *habōl* and ‘abōt for this last.

In the New Testament the Greek word occurs twice in the second letter to the Corinthians and once in that to the Ephesians.⁴⁰ In each of those passages the word *arrhabōn* is applied to the Spirit and translators have provided various renderings of it: pledge, first installment, guarantee, deposit, etc.⁴¹

Eventually, by the time when the New Testament texts were written, it seems clear that the *arrha/arrhabōn/’eravōn*, etc., had come to refer predominantly to the earnest money that served as an initial payment of part of the price when a sale or hire was agreed between two parties. It is on that use of

³⁷ The “cord” (*pātil*) is apparently that from which the seal was hung.

³⁸ The word is attested in Greek before the Septuagint and it is generally assumed that it had entered Greek via Phoenician. Both the *Targum Onkelos* and the *Targum Pseudo Jonathan* use Aramaic *mashkōnā* for ‘eravōn. Whether that merely represents a dialectical difference or reflects the fact that ‘eravōn had become the technical term for “earnest money” as distinct from “pledge” is not clear. For a summary of the possible linguistic development of terms cognate with ‘eravōn in various languages, see Ringgren, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 11: 326–30, s.v. ‘arab; Halayqa, *Comparative Lexicon*, 89, s.v. ‘RB 1; Wansbrough, *Lingua Franca*, 131–2.

³⁹ On ‘r-b and its derivatives in the Hebrew Bible, see Freedman, “Biblical Hebrew ‘rb.”

⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 1.22, 5.5; Eph. 1.14.

⁴¹ Kerr, “APPABΩΝ,” 95, notes that, for the New Testament passages, St Jerome used the Latin *pignus* while complaining that it obscured the meaning of the Greek word. The editors of the new version of the Vulgate (Vatican, 1979) opted for *arrabon*, while the *New Jerusalem Bible* uses the English, “pledge.”

the words that we should concentrate in attempting to understand the debate about the *'arabūn* in Islam.⁴²

Evidence about the institution, though not coherent or consistent and posing problems of interpretation, is to be found in texts such as contracts and diplomatic agreements that reflect actual practice and in more theoretical codes of law, such as those drawn up under the emperor Justinian and that of the so-called "Syro-Roman law book."⁴³

It is clear that in later Roman law the *arrha* or *arrhabōn* designated an installment on the agreed price of goods or services, to be deducted from the agreed price when the full payment was made.⁴⁴ In the event that the purchaser did not fulfill his side of the contract, the vendor could keep the *arrha* given to him by the purchaser. All that is consistent with the material on the *'arabūn* in Islamic sources. What is new is the information that if the vendor withdrew from the contract, he usually had to return double the amount of the

⁴² There is a related institution known as the *arrha sponsalia*, which is also left to one side here. That is the earnest money paid at the time when a contract of marriage was agreed. It may be of interest to note that in early times – as in the story of Judah – it was customary to give one's ring as a pledge and it may be that the custom has survived in the bridegroom's giving of a ring to the bride in modern marriage ceremonies.

⁴³ There is much scholarly debate about the provenance and nature of this latter collection of laws, which exists in several related but significantly different texts in various manuscripts and languages (Syriac, Arabic, Armenian). Originally written in Greek and first translated into Syriac, Gottfried Schiemann follows many others in thinking it probable that the Syriac translation was made in the fifth century. Crone, following Nallino, makes a persuasive case for thinking the translation to be post Arab conquest. How much eastern provincial practice it reflects is also debated, although it is clear that its basis is Roman law. It seems that it was not intended as a practical code of law, but had some other function, possibly a purely symbolic one. Cf. Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, 12, 14, and the references cited there; Schiemann, "Syro-Roman Law Book." The evidence of its various references to what it calls in Syriac the *rahbūnā*, therefore, should probably be taken as reflections of the Roman law on the *arrha* as it existed in the early Christian era.

⁴⁴ A passage referring to the *rahbūnā* in the text of the *Syrisch-römisches Rechtsbuch* [Syro-Roman law book], as edited by Bruns and Sachau, gave rise to various speculations about its effect in a sale. It seems, however, that the passage was very corrupt and, as it has been restored in the new edition by Selb and Kaufhold, says no more than that a simple agreement between the two parties is a sufficient basis for a binding contract of sale: neither the payment of earnest money nor of the full price are necessary for the contract to be binding. Selb reads that as a simplified statement of Roman law regarding a consensual sale, set out in a text intended for students. Cf. Selb and Kaufhold, eds., *Das Syrisch-Römische Rechtsbuch*, 2:56–7 to 2:58–9 (§34), and the commentary ad loc. in vol. 3; Bruns and Sachau, eds., *Syrisch-römisches Rechtsbuch*, 1:12–2:13 (§38 of the British Library Syriac long text).

arrha that the purchaser had given him. It will be remembered that the Islamic texts say little about the responsibilities of the vendor.⁴⁵

It is likely that payment of earnest money continued as a custom the significance of which changed over time. It may be that in some situations it had a real legal function, but in others survived more to meet the practical needs of merchants, or perhaps merely as an accepted custom. For example, it seems that in Greek law there was no mechanism for the enforcement of contracts of sale: it was presumed (as in Islamic law) that the goods and payments for them would be exchanged at the time when the sale took place.⁴⁶ Obviously, that could not always happen, however, and it might be envisaged that the payment of earnest money would operate as a way in which both parties to a sale would try to ensure the fulfillment of the contract. In that case one would expect the *arrhabōn* to be quite substantial, enough to make the purchaser fear losing it and the vendor afraid of having to return it doubled – or at least more than he had been given. In Roman law, on the other hand, the contract itself was regarded as binding and one would expect the *arrha*, therefore, to become less important, serving more as a token of good faith.⁴⁷ Whatever the case, it cannot be assumed that actual practice was closely related to official codes of law or that the rationale of the *arrha/arrhabōn* can be deduced from them.

Another legal system in which the institution was discussed was that of Rabbinical Judaism. Here too the *'eravōn* is not treated systematically in itself but mentioned as a normal element in commercial dealings, which has to be

45 For the vendor having to refund twice the amount in the event he withdraws from the contract, see Kerr, “APPABΩΝ,” 93, citing Hunt and Edgar, eds., *Select Papyri*, 1:51–3 (a papyrus from 99 CE records the engagement of a Persian woman, Thenetkouis, to work at the olive press of Lucius Bellenus; she received 16 drachmas from him as *arrhabōna*, which would be deducted by Lucius in installments from her wages; she would have to pay twice that amount back if she broke the contract). In the Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzia*, 48b, there is reference to a contract in which one party says, “If I retract, my *'eravōn* will be forfeit,” and the other replies, “If I retract, I will double your *'eravōn*.” See too, Gerhard Thür, “Arrha, Arrhabon” and Selb and Kaufhold, eds., *Das Syrisch-Römische Rechtsbuch*, 2:68 [text] = 2:69 [tr.], §46 (cf. Bruns and Sachau, eds., *Syrisch-römisches Rechtsbuch*, 1:15 [text] = 2:17 [tr.], §51 of the British Library Syriac long text).

46 Lee, *Elements of Roman Law*, 309; Kerr, “APPABΩΝ,” 93, citing Jones, *Law and Legal Theory of the Greeks*, 228.

47 See Thür, “Arrha, Arrhabon,” citing Justinian’s *Digest*, 18,1,35 pr. Thür considers that Justinian’s revision was much influenced by Greco-Hellenistic models and, regarding the *arrha*, diverges further than usual from classical Roman structures. He notes a contradiction between the Institutes (3,23 pr.) and Justinian’s Code (4,21,17,2) and says that much remains obscure about the role of the *arrha* in contracts, but it may be that it facilitated withdrawal from a contract that had not been written down.

taken into account when such things as the basic principles of alienation and acquisition, the validity of conditions in contracts, the importance of keeping one's word, and the dangers of usury, are discussed. In the Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzia* 48B, the issue addressed regarding the payment of the '*eravōn*' is whether, in the event that the vendor wishes to withdraw from the sale, the previous payment of earnest money entitled the purchaser to possession of all of the goods for which the price had been agreed, or only to an amount equal to the value of the earnest money paid.

There were different views about that. One authority is quoted as saying that, if an explicit contract had been made to the effect that the purchaser promised to forfeit his deposit if he did not go through with the sale and the vendor promised to repay double the amount if he did not, then the agreement was binding and the payment of the deposit gave the purchaser the rights to all of the goods in question.⁴⁸ Others, though, said that the purchaser only had the right to goods to the value of the earnest money that had been paid.

It is of interest that implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, a distinction is made between movable and immovable property: in the case of the former, according to one stated opinion, if the vendor did not wish to go through with the contract, the earnest money only entitled the purchaser to goods to the value of the deposit paid, whereas in the case of real estate payment of the deposit entitled the purchaser to possession of the whole. He had to pay off the remainder of the purchase price no matter how long it took.

With regard to the sale of real estate, an example is mentioned wherein the purchaser paid a deposit of 50% (500 *zuzim* on a purchase price of 1,000). That implies that the '*eravōn*' could be substantial and there is evidence of more than 50% deposits also in Roman Egypt.⁴⁹

One case referred to concerns an agreed sale of salt from which the vendor wished to withdraw because the price of salt had risen significantly in the

⁴⁸ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, 12:11, 4, discusses the '*eravōn*' in the light of regulations about *asmakhta* contracts – contracts involving conditions or commitments that it is not envisaged will ever have to be met. His position is that if the purchaser withdraws, he loses the earnest money, but if the vendor withdraws he does not have to pay it back doubled, because "an *asmakhta* does not confer title." That seems to imply that when the contract was made both parties intended to fulfill it, but the purchaser still had a real right to withdraw, while the vendor's right was purely theoretical and there was no serious consideration that he would not deliver the promised goods. Here Maimonides opposes the view of R. Jose in Talmud, *Baba Metzia*, 48B, that if a contract involving the payment of earnest money is formally made, its terms are binding for all parties because "*asmakhta* acquires title."

⁴⁹ Lee, *Elements of Roman Law*, 309, n. 93.

period between the agreement to sell and the time for delivery. It is clear that the ‘eravōn had been paid. It will be remembered that salt is mentioned in one of Ibn Abī Shayba’s reports regarding Ibn Sirīn’s approval of the payment of earnest money in a sale. The Talmudic report suggests that the problem about salt (and by implication the other foodstuffs and perishables referred to in Ibn Abī Shayba’s traditions) is that prices for them were volatile and that the vendor risked losing money in the time between the sale agreement being made and the time for the delivery of the goods. Of course, there is the possibility of a comparable disadvantage being suffered by the purchaser if prices decreased after the initial agreement had been made, but the report does not consider that.

The first issue considered in *Baba Metzia* 48B is the conflict between the principle that the Israelite who breaks his word should be subject to the curse of “He who punished” (*mī shepara’*), on the one hand, and on the other that it is implicit in the contract involving earnest money that its payment enabled both the purchaser and the vendor to withdraw from their agreement so long as they were willing to forego the earnest money (in the case of the purchaser) or repay it doubled (in the case of the vendor).⁵⁰ Is the one who withdraws from the contract really to be cursed or merely to be warned that God punishes those who break their word? The position of Maimonides is that the one who withdraws is to be cursed in court and the money refunded, even if only the ‘eravōn had been paid.⁵¹

The possibility of usury (*neshekha*) when only a part of the agreed purchase price for land is given and the property remains in the possession of the vendor pending completion of the sale is illustrated by the examples given in Mishna *Baba Metzia* 5.3 and the corresponding *gemara* at Babylonian Talmud *Baba Metzia* 67A, which involves the sale of a field for only part of the purchase price. If no time limit is imposed on the obligation to pay the balance of the purchase price, the sale is prohibited, as it would be under Islamic law. In his commentary Rashi explains that if the buyer ultimately completes the sale while the vendor has enjoyed the usufruct during the interim period, the transaction resembles a loan with interest on the balance, because the vendor has received a benefit that in retrospect should have belonged to the purchaser.

Again we may ask how far these discussions in rabbinical law are relevant to what took place in actual merchant practice. In a recent article Ron S. Kleinman has considered the ways in which mercantile practices in medieval Europe influenced the understanding of certain Biblical and Talmudic texts

⁵⁰ The discussion arises on the basis of Mishnah, *Baba Metzia*, 4.2.

⁵¹ *Mishneh Torah*, 12:7, 1–2.

by the rabbis of the time.⁵² He refers to the common practice among the merchants of the payment of earnest money in advance payment for merchandise and argues that it was that mercantile custom that led some to interpret the word *situmta*⁵³ in Talmud *Baba Metzia* 74A as a coin. That was not the only interpretation of it and Kleinman argues that others also reflected the practices of medieval merchants.

In the payment of earnest money Jewish merchants shared a custom with non-Jews. Kleinman relates the practice to the *arrha* of Roman law and lists a number of German terms such as Kaufschilling, Darangeld, and Gottespfennig that refer to such earnest money. Some of those German terms then entered Yiddish and are to be found in *responsa* by later rabbis.⁵⁴ This mercantile practice presumably perpetuated something that had been going on around the Mediterranean for centuries and was independent of any legal system, whether Greek, Roman, Islamic, or Jewish, although those various systems had sometimes to refer to, and even try to regulate, it from time to time. Its survival well into the Middle Ages is attested in both commercial and diplomatic contexts.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Evidence regarding the institution of paying earnest money at the first stage of an agreement for sale or hire (the balance of the money to be paid later), in practice and in various legal systems, does not really allow of a completely systematic treatment. It is likely that the practice varied from place to place and time to time, and that this affected the role and significance of the payment in relation to the contract. Sometimes it may have been merely symbolic, at others a substantial sum. The relationship between legal theory and actual practice is a further area of uncertainty.

Regarding the material about the ‘*arabūn*’ in Islamic texts, the most notable thing is that a substantial proportion of Islamic scholars thought that a

⁵² Kleinman, “Realia,” 25–50.

⁵³ The word apparently refers to a way of acquiring something legally and it came to be used by the Rabbis as a way of giving legal validity to modes of acquisition that had become customary but were not firmly anchored in the Mishnah and Talmud. Kleinman, “Realia,” 33–4.

⁵⁴ Kleinman, “Realia,” 42–3 and the sources given there.

⁵⁵ The Geniza evidence is assessed in Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 1:199 and 1:449–50, n.36, where the transaction involves salt and ‘*urbūn*’ (or ‘*arabūn*’) is likely to mean down payment; the occurrence of this term in diplomatic texts is discussed by Wansbrough, “Venice and Florence,” 498, line 36, and 511 n. 70.

long-established feature of commercial activity in the Mediterranean and the Middle East had been prohibited by the Prophet.

Given the tension between the practice of *'arabūn* and certain principles of Islamic commercial law (such as its aversion to risk, its opposition to the enrichment of one party at the expense of another, and its principle that a contract cannot be withdrawn from once an offer has been accepted), it is not really surprising that the practice would come to be seen as reprehensible by some. It seems possible, however, that the dominant reason given for its rejection in classical works of *fīqh* – its association with risk (*gharar*) – is a secondary one, and that early opposition to it focused more on the possibilities it offered for one party to benefit unfairly at the expense of the other and, in effect, to exploit the contract in ways that circumvented the principle that a sale must involve the exchange of goods of equal value.⁵⁶ That would be consistent with Rashi's concern that sales when the full price was not paid immediately and no fixed term agreed for the payment could lead to usury.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the objection to contracts involving earnest money has an ethical basis. In Islam, as in Judaism, the problems with it arise when a commonly accepted practice is subjected to the scrutiny of scholars who apply moral principles to it.

The evidence regarding this institution in other legal systems and in actual practice does throw some light on the debate in the Muslim sources, in the sense that it perhaps helps us to understand some of the traditions and legal opinions that they cite, but even with that help much remains obscure. The distinction between movable and immovable property that is specifically addressed in rabbinical texts may be relevant for some of the Muslim reports, even though the latter do not refer to it explicitly. The tension visible in the Talmudic material between contracts involving earnest money that allow the two parties to subsequently withdraw from the contract, on the one hand, and the principle that one should not break one's word, on the other, may also be relevant to understanding the rejection of the *'arabūn* by some Muslims, even though again it is not mentioned specifically.

Finally, it hardly seems possible to be specific about the precise circumstances in which the early Islamic scholars became familiar with the institution of the *'arabūn*. Schacht saw the term and the contract it designates as entering Islamic law in the Hijāz from Byzantine law during the first century

⁵⁶ Norman Calder suggested that *gharar* developed only gradually as an organizing principle for the rejection of a number of financial transactions: see his review of Saleh's monograph on the Islamic scholars' treatment of unlawful gain (Calder, review of *Unlawful Gain*, by N. A. Saleh, 362).

of Islam. “The Byzantine institution of the arrhes, together with its technical term, thus entered the Hijaz from Syria in the course of the first century of the Hijra.”⁵⁷ As we have noted, Schacht proposed that, before Islam, the idea of earnest money was known to the Arabs generally, but that they had replaced the older word for it by the Arabic term *rahn*. In Islamic times, the older word then reappeared in Medinese usage. He concludes, therefore: “A concept of Islamic law that ignores a pre-Islamic usage and an explicit passage of the Qur’ān requires an explanation. The most simple is the hypothesis that the early Muslim jurisprudents adopted an idea that was well known in the conquered Byzantine provinces.”

As well as conflating *rahn* and ‘*arabūn*, Schacht’s view seems to depend on the fact that his main source of evidence for the ‘*arabūn* was the *Muwatṭa'*. It is unlikely, however, that the material collected by Ibn Abī Shayba, and the position of Ibn Ḥanbal, were responses to the *Muwatṭa'*. Rather, they seem to be of independent origin and they suggest that the institution was widely known in Iraq and elsewhere. Indeed it was a part of the custom and law of the Middle East generally that the early Muslim lawyers inherited.

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57 “L’institution byzantine des arrhes a donc pénétré, avec son terme technique, de la Syrie en Hidjaz au courant du premier siècle de l’héjire” (Schacht, “Droit byzantin et droit musulman,” 210). [We thank Daniel Frank for providing us with the text of this article.] Schacht adds (n. 5) that he knows of no other example of the direct influence of Byzantine law on the customary law of Medina.

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“A Bequest May Not Exceed One-Third”: An *Isnād-cum-Matn* Analysis and Beyond

*Pavel Pavlovitch and David S. Powers**

[T]he open-ended concept of *hiğra* is one of the rare Islamic notions of which we can unequivocally say that they take us back to the beginnings.

PATRICIA CRONE, “*The First-Century Concept of Hiğra*.¹

Introduction

The Qur’ān contains two sets of verses that treat the subject of inheritance, one dealing with bequests, the other with inheritance shares.

The first set of verses (“the bequest verses”) indicates that a person contemplating death enjoyed considerable freedom to determine how his property would be distributed after his death. The Qur’ān commands believers to leave a bequest (*waṣīyya*) for parents and close relatives (Q 2.180), and advises a man contemplating death that he may leave a bequest of up to one year’s maintenance for a widow, with the understanding that she will remain in his home during that period (Q 2.240). The Qur’ān also instructs believers to draw up a bequest in the presence of two trustworthy witnesses (Q 5.106–107), and it warns them not to alter a bequest after it has been duly attested (Q 2.181). In the event of a disagreement, the opposing parties are encouraged to reconcile their differences (Q 2.182).

The second set of verses (“the inheritance verses”) affirms the inheritance rights of both men and women (Q 4.8) and specifies the exact fractional shares to be awarded to a surviving daughter(s), parent(s), sibling(s), and/or spouse (Q 4.11–12 and 176).

One might argue that the bequest verses and the inheritance verses represent alternative regimes, i.e., one set of rules in the event that a person leaves a last will and testament and the other in the event that s/he does not. There is

* We thank Behnam Sadeghi for his thorough and critical reading of the penultimate version of this essay.

¹ Crone, “The First-Century Concept of *Hiğra*,” 383.

little or no evidence in the Islamic sources, however, to suggest that these two sets of verses were ever viewed in this manner. Instead, these two sets of verses were combined into a single regime that seeks to strike a balance between testamentary freedom in the form of bequests, on the one hand, and compulsory rules for the division of wealth in the form of fractional shares of inheritance, on the other.

Islamic tradition teaches that the relationship between the bequest verses and the inheritance verses was defined by the Prophet Muḥammad himself. First, the Prophet is said to have issued an instruction according to which “a bequest may not exceed one-third of the estate.” This instruction was understood as meaning that a person contemplating death may dispose of no more than one-third of his/her wealth in the form of a bequest. By setting the upper limit of a bequest at one-third, the Prophet insured that a minimum of two-thirds of any estate would be divided up in accordance with the fractional shares specified in the inheritance verses. Second, the Prophet is reported to have said, “No bequest to an heir.” This instruction was understood as meaning that no heir, that is to say, no person who receives a fractional share of the estate according to the inheritance verses, may receive a bequest in addition to that share. Indeed, Muslim jurists teach that the prophetic dictum “no bequest to an heir” serves as an indicator that two of the bequest verses – Q 2.180 and 2.240 – were abrogated. In this manner, the bequest verses and the inheritance verses were fused together to create a single, comprehensive inheritance regime that came to be known as the *‘ilm al-farā’id* or “science of the shares.”

We are concerned here with the first of the two sunnaic pillars upon which the science of the shares rests: “a bequest may not exceed one-third of the estate.” Over the past 80 years, at least seven scholars have attempted to either confirm or disprove the validity of the attribution of this dictum to the Prophet. These seven scholars may be placed into three groups: (1) N. J. Coulson² and D. S. Powers³ have both argued – albeit for different reasons – that it was the Prophet himself who set the limit on bequests at one-third; (2) I. Zaman highlighted the role played by al-Zuhrī as an early transmitter of traditions about the one-third restriction – albeit without ruling out the possibility of authenticity;⁴

² Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law*, 69 (“In regulating a problem posed by the Qur’ānic rules themselves the Prophet set the limit of legacies at one-third”). Cf. Coulson, “Correspondence.”

³ Powers, “The Will,” 53 (“the one-third restriction may, in fact, have been introduced by Muhammad in connection with the Qur’ānic inheritance legislation”). See also Powers, “On Bequests in Early Islam,” 199 (the argument for authenticity “provides a simpler and more reasonable explanation of the data”).

⁴ Zaman, “Evolution,” 87–8, 107, 137–8, 146, 152, 191; cf. Zaman, “Science of *Rijāl*,” 3, 18.

and (3) G.-H. Bousquet,⁵ J. Schacht,⁶ R. M. Speight,⁷ and P. Crone⁸ have argued – again, for different reasons – that the Prophet himself did not utter this statement.

In 1989, Powers stated that he would continue to maintain that the one-third restriction was introduced by the Prophet “until such time as a compelling argument to the contrary is advanced.”⁹ Since that time, scholars have developed sophisticated techniques that in some instances make it possible to determine where, when, and by whom a particular tradition was first put into circulation. In what follows, we apply these techniques to the tradition in which the Prophet is said to have established the one-third restriction.

In this essay we focus on what we call “the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī tradition,” which, it will be argued, is a compound narrative put together by the Baghdadi traditionist ‘Affān b. Muslim (134–220/751–835) or, possibly, by his informant, Wuhayb b. Khālid (d. 156/772–3). We will show that this narrative is based on at least two earlier traditions put into circulation by the Meccans ‘Abd Allāh b. Khuthaym (d. 136/753 or 144/761–2) and Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767–8). Although Ibn Jurayj’s tradition may refer to an even earlier “burial motif,” we have been unable to identify the source of this motif or to demonstrate that it was put into circulation during the lifetime of the Prophet. Based on our findings – in our view, compelling – Powers is now prepared to withdraw his earlier argument that the one-third restriction was introduced by Muhammad.

We begin with a brief review of previous scholarship on this tradition.

2 Previous Scholarship

The one-third restriction is found in a tradition in which the Prophet advises the Companion, Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ, that he may leave a bequest of no more than one-third of his wealth.

5 Bousquet et Peltier, *Les Successions*, 141–2 (Muslim jurists of the first century AH were unlikely to have invented a prophetic tradition placing severe limits on testamentary dispositions).

6 Schacht, *Origins*, 202 (“the restriction of legacies to one-third of the estate was . . . directly based on an Umayyad administrative regulation”). See also Schacht, “Modernism and Traditionalism.”

7 Speight, “The Will,” 265 (“the rule of no more than one-third was made in the fiscal interest of the [Umayyad] empire”).

8 Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, 96 (“the limitation of bequests to a third hardly goes back to the Prophet himself”).

9 Powers, “On Bequests in Early Islam,” 199.

In 1973 R. M. Speight analyzed 19 parallel versions of this tradition, to which he applied the principles of form criticism in an attempt to determine the chronological order in which they were put into circulation.¹⁰ Speight ignored the *isnāds* and also made two assumptions about the text: first, that a third-person narrative is earlier than a first-person narrative;¹¹ and, second, that a short narrative must be older than a longer version of the same.¹² Both of these assumptions are questionable.¹³ Be that as it may, Speight concluded that the Sa‘d-will traditions¹⁴ were put into circulation “sometime during the Umayyad period.”¹⁵

In 1983 D. S. Powers analyzed the same corpus of 19 traditions – again, from the perspective of form criticism. Powers argued that the first four traditions in Speight’s corpus do not in fact belong there because of substantive differences between their contents and those of the remaining 15 reports. He drew attention to a linguistic connection between version 5 of Speight’s corpus and Q 4.12 – one of the inheritance verses. He also established that the Sa‘d-will tradition was at one time regarded as the occasion for the revelation of this verse. Powers concluded that the one-third restriction “*may*, in fact, have been introduced by Muhammad in connection with the Qur’ānic inheritance legislation” (emphasis added).¹⁶

In 1989 Powers analyzed the *isnāds* of the 15 parallel versions of the Sa‘d-will tradition. The *isnād* chart that he produced suggests that Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ was the common link and that he transmitted the story to at least seven people over a period of 30 years between 25 and 45 AH. But the chart is misleading because Powers used a limited number of versions of the Sa‘d-will tradition and was overly credulous about the value of single-strand *isnāds*. It was on the

¹⁰ Form criticism involves the close analysis of formal criteria such as the length of a text, use of direct (first person), and indirect (third person) speech, narrative perspective, and the level of textual unity and coherence.

¹¹ Speight, “The Will,” 250.

¹² Although Speight does not explicitly formulate the rule that a short tradition must be older than a longer version of the same, he clearly uses it when positing successive stages in the textual evolution of traditions (what he calls “horizontal” and “vertical” development) (“The Will,” 250–3, and *passim*).

¹³ Powers, “The Will,” 42–3; Zaman, “Evolution,” 110 ff; Motzki, “Dating,” 213.

¹⁴ The “Sa‘d-will tradition” rubric fails to account for the diverse content of the traditions under consideration here, but we use it as a convenient expression of the main legal issue treated in these traditions.

¹⁵ Speight, “The Will,” 267.

¹⁶ Powers, “The Will,” 53.

basis of this evidence that Powers concluded that the one-third restriction *may* represent an actual ruling of the Prophet.¹⁷

Also in 1989, Iftikhar Zaman submitted a doctoral dissertation in which he collected and analyzed more than 100 parallel versions of the Sa‘d-will tradition (including the 19 versions studied previously by Speight and Powers).¹⁸ He divided the component parts of these narratives into thematic units, meticulously recording hundreds of textual variants and placing the *matns* into groups that share the same general meaning. Thus, Zaman was one of the first scholars to deploy the technique that has come to be known as *isnād-cum-matn* analysis (on which, see below) – albeit without using this rubric. Zaman was able to establish that an early version of the tradition was transmitted by al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742)¹⁹ and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778).²⁰ Hence, the earliest version may be dated sometime in the last quarter of the first century AH or the first quarter of the second.

3 *Isnād-cum-Matn* Analysis

In the present essay, we focus our attention on a subset of Zaman’s corpus of 100 traditions. The 17 texts in our corpus form a distinct group that we call “the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster.” Whereas Speight and Powers examined only one tradition in this cluster – no. 17 in Speight’s corpus – Zaman found six additional versions of the same tradition.²¹ At the same time, however, Zaman ignored or was unaware of at least six more traditions in the cluster that contain what may be important variants in both their *isnāds* and *matns*. We include these additional texts in our corpus in an effort to build upon Zaman’s work and to confirm – albeit with qualifications – his conclusions.

The 17 traditions in the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster focus on the Companion Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ (d. between 50/670–1 and 58/677–8). Thirteen of these traditions combine two or more of the following four motifs: (1) Sa‘d’s illness in 8/630, in Mecca, during which he received a sick-visit from the Prophet Muḥammad; (2) one or more questions posed by Sa‘d to the Prophet about the size of a bequest he might leave after his death; (3) Sa‘d’s concern over the possibility

¹⁷ Powers, “On Bequests,” 193–7.

¹⁸ Zaman, “Evolution.” For a summary of Zaman’s dissertation findings, see his “Science of *Rijāl*.”

¹⁹ Zaman, “Evolution,” 52–3, 87–8, 107, 137–8, 146, 152, 191.

²⁰ Ibid., 57, 146.

²¹ Ibid., 78–80, 174–6.

that he might die in Mecca, a town that he had left as an emigrant in 1/622; and (4) the Prophet's prediction that God would raise up Sa'd for future exploits. Four of the traditions in the cluster mention only the third motif – Sa'd's concern about dying in Mecca. We treat these four traditions as part of the larger cluster for two reasons: (1) their *isnāds* overlap in part with the *isnāds* of the other 13 traditions; (2) their *matns* focus on a motif that is found in most of the other 13 *matns*.

We will analyze these 17 traditions using a modified version of the technique known as *isnād-cum-matn* analysis (ICMA), which was developed to study the relationship between the contents of a tradition (*matn*) and its multiple chains of transmission (*isnāds*).²² The technique involves plotting the *isnāds* in a diagram as a web of diachronic links between extant *hadīth* collectors and their informants, down to a purported original source. At one or more points at which *isnāds* intersect, we find a “key figure.” If it can be established that a key figure transmitted a specific version of the tradition in question, he is regarded as either a common link (CL) or a partial common link (PCL).

Isnāds, by themselves, are not sufficient to establish the status of a key figure. One must also take into consideration the evidence of *matns*. We do this by comparing as many versions as possible that converge on a single key figure, starting with the narratives preserved in the earliest extant collections. If *matns* that converge on a key figure have the same wording – fully or in part – this key figure is regarded as a PCL of the common material. Similarly, if (1) the (reconstructed) *matns* transmitted by several PCLS and/or by one or more direct collectors²³ have the same wording – again, fully or in part – and (2) they pass through an earlier key figure, the earlier key figure is treated as the CL of the cluster. By CL, we mean the first person to transmit a proto-version of the narrative that we have reconstructed by comparing the *matns* of the PCLS and the direct collectors. The CL may have been responsible for the formulation of this proto-version or he may have received it from his immediate source. Using only ICMA, however, it is not possible to determine which of

22 A combined *isnād* and *matn* analysis of Islamic traditions was undertaken by Hendrik Kramers in 1953 and by Josef van Ess in 1975, but, for different reasons, their respective contributions to this method of analysis have passed unnoticed (see Motzki, “Dating,” 250). The same applies to Zaman, whose 1989 PhD thesis has not been published. The basic principles of ICMA were formulated in 1996 by Gregor Schoeler (*Character und Authentie*) and Harald Motzki (“Quo Vadis”). Descriptions of ICMA may be found in Motzki, “The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Huqayq,” 174–5; Motzki, “Dating,” 251–2; and Görke, “Eschatology, History and the Common Link,” 191ff.

23 By “direct collectors,” we mean collectors who (1) received the tradition directly from the key figure and (2) whose collections are extant.

these two possibilities is more likely to have been the case. For this reason, a scholar who works only with ICMA can say little or nothing about the content or transmission history of a tradition below the level of the CL. But there are other techniques that can be used to recover this history, as we will suggest in section 5, below.

Any attempt to measure similarity or difference between two or more versions of a narrative – what we consider a “formal criterion” – is subjective. For example, we require a high degree of textual agreement between two or more versions of a narrative in order to accept that those versions derive – fully or in part – from a common proto-version. For this reason, it is difficult to reconstruct the exact wording of a narrative circulated by a CL or to determine if the CL version is based on an even older narrative.

This challenge may be addressed by combining the formal criteria of *matn* analysis with other, substantive, criteria. That is to say, after completing the formal *isnād*-cum-*matn* analysis, we turn to the content and transmission history of the tradition *below* the level of the CL, looking for substantive clues in the narrative that may provide evidence about its early history. In the present instance, there are three types of evidence: one relating to the meaning of a difficult word, another relating to change in the understanding of a legal obligation, and a third relating to a prediction. By supplementing our *isnād*-cum-*matn* analysis with these three types of evidence, we will attempt to establish the period in which the Sa'd-will tradition was first put into circulation, its earliest formulation, and changes in that formulation over time.

4 The Family *isnād* through 'Amr b. al-Qārī

The *matn* of the tradition in which we are interested is attached to a family *isnād* that is said to have originated with a Companion by the name of 'Amr b. al-Qārī (see Figure 6.1).

Almost nothing is known about 'Amr b. al-Qārī. He was, according to Khalifa b. Khayyāt (d. 240/854), a Companion who transmitted *hadīths* from the Prophet.²⁴ To this, later biographers add only that 'Amr transmitted the tradition about Sa'd's bequest²⁵ and that, following the battle of Hunayn in Shawwāl 8/January 630, the Prophet entrusted the booty to 'Amr at a place

²⁴ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tabaqāt*, 34.

²⁵ See al-Bukhārī, *Tārīkh*, 6:31; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ*, 6:270–1; Ibn Qāni', *Mujam*, 2:220–1.

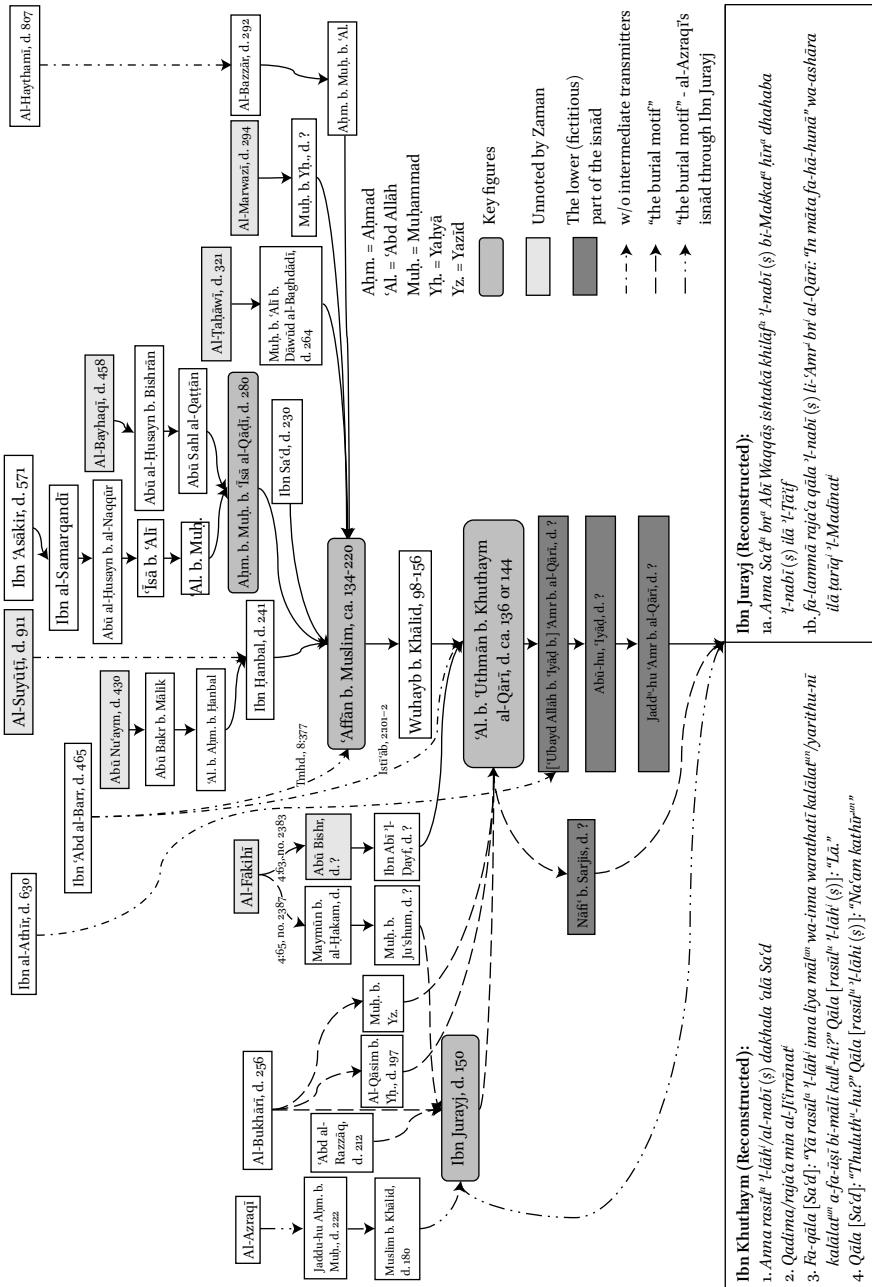


FIGURE 6.1 Transmission history and reconstructed wording of the *Sād-will* tradition via *Amr b. al-Qāri‘*.

called al-Ji‘irrāna.²⁶ The information about ‘Amr b. al-Qārī appears to be derived from the *isnāds* and *matns* of the tradition under examination here. Otherwise, Muslim biographers do not know anything about this Companion.

Let us now examine the key figures in the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster.

4.1 *Affān b. Muslim*

The Basran traditionist ‘Affān b. Muslim al-Şaffār (134–220 AH) is an important key figure in the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster (see Figure 6.1). According to the *isnād* evidence, Ibn Sa‘d, Ibn Ḥanbal, and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḫisā al-Qādī received the tradition directly from ‘Affān. Whereas Ibn Ḥanbal is cited by Abū Nu‘aym and al-Suyūṭī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḫisā al-Qādī is cited by al-Bayhaqī and Ibn ‘Asākir. ‘Affān’s cluster also includes the traditions of al-Marwazī, al-Bazzār (as cited by al-Haythamī), al-Ṭahāwī, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, all of which are attached to single-strand *isnāds*. First, we shall compare the versions of Ibn Sa‘d and Ibn Ḥanbal, who are direct collectors. Then, we shall try to reconstruct the version of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḫisā al-Qādī. Finally, we shall add to the comparison the *matns* carried by single-strand *isnāds*.

Matn-Composite 1 summarizes the complete versions of ‘Affān b. Muslim’s tradition.²⁷ The incomplete versions and the anomalous variant of al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār are cited separately.

Matn-Composite 1 (boldface indicates the shared elements of the narratives; numbers in superscript refer to the variant transmissions)

The traditions included in *Matn-Composite 1*:

1 = Ibn Sa‘d → ‘Affān b. Muslim

2 = Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal → ‘Affān b. Muslim

3 = Al-Bayhaqī → Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḫisā al-Qādī → ‘Affān b. Muslim

4 = Ibn ‘Asākir → Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḫisā al-Qādī → ‘Affān b. Muslim

5 = Al-Ṭahāwī → Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Dāwūd al-Baghdādī

Matn-Composite:

1a. *Anna rasūla ’l-lāhi (ṣ) qadima [Makkat^a]⁴,⁵ wa-khallafa Sa‘d^a marīd^a hayth^u kharaja ilā Hunayn*

26 Ibn Hishām identifies the person to whom the Prophet entrusted the booty as Mas‘ūd b. ‘Amr al-Ghifārī (*Sīrat al-nabī*, 2:459). Since this putative Companion is an otherwise completely unknown figure, we suspect that al-Ghifārī is a corruption of al-Qārī.

27 We thank Behnam Sadeghi for his suggestion to combine similar *matns* into a *matn-composite*, which not only saves space but also highlights points of agreement and/or disagreement between individual *matns*.

1b. *fa-lammā qadima min [al-]^{1, 3, 5} Jī'irrāna mu'tamir'an dakhala 'alay-hi wa-huwa waji'un maghlüb'un*

2a. *Fa-qāla [Sa'd]: "Yā^{1, 2, 4, 5} [li]³ rasūl^a 'l-lāhⁱ inna liya māl'an wa-innī ūrathu kalālat'an [a-]^{1, 2} fa-ūṣī bi-mālī [kulli-hi]^{2, 5} aw ataṣaddaqu [bi-hi]^{1, 2, 5?" Qāla [rasūl'u 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: "Lā."^{1, 2, 4, 5}}*

2b. *[Qāla [Sa'd]: "[A-]^{1, 2} fa-ūṣī bi-thuluthay-hi?" Qāla [rasūl'u 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: "Lā."^{1, 2, 5}*

2c. *[Qāla [Sa'd]: "A-fa-ūṣī bi-shaṭrī-hi?" Qāla [rasūl'u 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: "Lā."^{1, 2}*

2d. *[Qāla [Sa'd]: "[A-]^{1, 2} fa-ūṣī⁴ bi-thuluthī-hi?" Qāla [rasūl'u 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: "Na'am. Wa-[dhālika]¹ [dhāka]^{2, 3, 4, 5} kathīr^{un}" [aw "kabīr^{un}."]¹*

3a. *Qāla [Sa'd]: "Ayy rasūl^a 'l-lāhⁱ [a-[fa-]⁵ mayyit^{un} anā]^{1, 5} [amūtu]² [uṣību]³ [āmantu]⁴ bī'l-dārī 'l-latī kharajtu mīn-hā muhājir'an?" Qāla [rasūl'u 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: "Innī la-arjū an yarfa'a-ka 'l-lāh^u ['azza wa-jalla]³ [fa-yanka'a]^{1, 2} [fa-yunka'a]⁵ [wa-anyukāda]³ [fa-yusā'a]⁴ bi-ka aqwām'an [wa-yantaf'a]^{1, 3, 4} [wa-yanfa'a]² [wa-yunfa'a]⁵ bi-ka ākhārūna.*

3b. *Yā 'Amr^u bn^a 'l-Qārī in māta Sa'd^{un} ba'dī [fa-hā-hunā [fa-]² ḍfin-hu]^{1, 2, 3, 4} [fa-ḍfin-hu hā-hunā]⁵ [ya'nī]⁵ [naḥw^a]^{1, 2, 3, 5} ['an]⁴ ṭariq 'l-Madīnatⁱ wa-ashāra bi-yadī-hi [hā-kadhā]^{1, 2, 3, 5}*

1a. The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) came [to Mecca]^{4, 5} and he left Sa'd ill as he [viz., the Prophet] set out for Ḥunayn.

1b. Then, when he [viz., the Prophet] arrived [in Mecca] as a pilgrim coming from [al-]^{1, 3, 5} Jī'irrāna, he entered upon him [viz., Sa'd] as he [viz., Sa'd] was suffering, overcome [by his illness].

2a. [Sa'd] said: "[O,]^{1, 2, 4, 5} [to the]³ Messenger of Allah, I have wealth and I will die in a state of being inherited by relatives other than a parent or child, [so] may I bequeath [all of]^{2, 5} my wealth or distribute [it]^{1, 2, 5} as alms" [[The Messenger of Allah(ṣ)] said: "No."]^{1, 2, 4, 5}

2b. [[Sa'd] said: "May I bequeath two-thirds of it?" [The Messenger of Allah (ṣ)] said: "No."]^{1, 2, 5}

2c. [[Sa'd] said: "May I bequeath half of it?" [The Messenger of Allah (ṣ)] said: "No."]^{1, 2}

2d. [[Sa'd] said: "May I bequeath]^{1, 2, 4, 5} one-third of it?" The Messenger of Allah said: "Yes, and [that]¹[this]^{2, 3, 4, 5} is a lot" [- or "much."]¹

3a. [Sa'd] said: "O, Messenger of Allah, [am I to die]^{1, 5} [will I die]² [will I be struck [dead]]³ [will I be safe]⁴ in the abode from which I departed as an emigrant? [The Messenger of Allah(ṣ)] said: "I hope that Allah [may He be magnified and exalted]³ will raise you up [to discomfit some

people]^{1, 2} [so that some people will be [discomfited]⁵ [deceived]³ [harmed]⁴]^{3, 4, 5} through you, while [He will avail others]² [others will benefit]^{1, 3, 4, 5} through you.

3b. O ‘Amr b. al-Qārī, if Sa‘d dies after I do, then [there bury him]^{1, 2, 3, 4} [bury him there]⁵ [that is]⁵ [facing]^{1, 2, 3, 5} [on]⁴ the way to Medina – and he pointed with his hand, [like this]^{1, 2, 3, 5}.

The traditions found in Ibn Sa‘d²⁸ and Ahmād b. Ḥanbal²⁹ are virtually identical. It is therefore likely that both share ‘Affān b. Muslim as their common source. Let us compare the *matns* of these two direct collectors with the other *matns* attributed to ‘Affān.

The version of Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Īsā al-Qādī (d. 280/893–4) may be reconstructed from the collections of al-Bayhaqī³⁰ and Ibn ‘Asākir³¹ (see *Matn-Composite 1*). The main difference between the two traditions is in clauses 2a and 2d. According to al-Bayhaqī, Sa‘d asked the Prophet a single question, “May I bequeath my wealth or distribute as alms one-third of it?” According to Ibn ‘Asākir, Sa‘d first asks, “May I bequeath my wealth or distribute it as alms?” Only after receiving a negative answer does he ask if he might bequeath one-third of his property. The Prophet assents.

In every other tradition in our corpus, with the exception of al-Bayhaqī’s version, Sa‘d begins his conversation with the Prophet by asking if he might bequeath his wealth – presumably all of it. For this reason, we are inclined to view al-Bayhaqī’s omission of that question as a scribal error. If so, then Ibn ‘Asākir’s two-question format appears to be an accurate representation of Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Īsā al-Qādī’s PCL version.³² This version would not have included clauses 2b and 2c.

²⁸ Ibn Sa‘d, *Tabaqāt*, 3:135.

²⁹ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 27:125, no. 16,584. Ibn Ḥanbal’s tradition is cited in full by Abū Nu‘aym (*Ma’rifat al-ṣahāba*, 3:1994–5), and in part – only the Sa‘d-will concern – by al-Suyūṭī (*al-Durr al-manthūr*, 5:155).

³⁰ Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 9:18–19.

³¹ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 20:336–7.

³² The anonymous editor of the first edition of al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā* (Hyderabad, 1344–55/1925–38) has added in parentheses not only the reference to “all of my wealth,” but also Sa‘d’s questions about two-thirds and one-half of his wealth. Neither he nor Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā, the editor of the 2003 edition (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya), specifies whether the emendation is based on another manuscript or on another tradition that belongs to the same *isnād-cum-matn* family. For this reason, the emendation should not be considered part of al-Bayhaqī’s original text.

The most important difference between our reconstructed version of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʻIsā al-Qādī, on the one hand, and the traditions found in Ibn Saʻd and Ibn Ḥanbal, on the other, relates to the conversation between Saʻd and the Prophet. In clauses 2a – c in Ibn Saʻd and Ibn Ḥanbal, it will be recalled, Saʻd asks if he may bequeath (or distribute as alms) his wealth – presumably all of it, two-thirds of it, or one-half of it, respectively. In each instance, the Prophet says, “No.” In al-Qādī’s tradition, however, clauses 2b and 2c are absent, that is, Saʻd asks if he may bequeath all of his wealth, and, after receiving a negative response, inquires about one-third of it. The Prophet replies, “Yes, and that is a lot.” Clause 3 in al-Qādī’s tradition is again identical to the corresponding clause in Ibn Saʻd and Ibn Ḥanbal.

The level of agreement between the *matns* found in Ibn Saʻd, Ibn Ḥanbal, and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʻIsā al-Qādī indicates that they share a common base narrative, which was transmitted to them by ‘Affān b. Muslim. Let us now examine the traditions of al-Marwazī, al-Bazzār (as cited by al-Haythami), al-Ṭahāwī, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in an effort to determine the formulation and structure of ‘Affān’s *matn* and to answer the question of whether it included clauses 2b and 2c, in which Saʻd inquires about one-third and one-half of his property.

4.1.1 Al-Marwazī (d. 294/906–7) on the Authority of Muḥammad b. Yahyā and ‘Affān b. Muslim

Clauses 1 and 2 of this *matn* are identical to the corresponding clauses in Ibn Saʻd and Ibn Ḥanbal, with one minor exception.³³ However, clause 3 – the *hijra* concern – is absent in al-Marwazī. This omission was in all likelihood deliberate: al-Marwazī records the Saʻd-will tradition in a chapter devoted to bequests, a subject that has little or no bearing on Saʻd’s fear of dying in Mecca after having left it as an emigrant. It would appear that al-Marwazī felt free to delete a clause in the Saʻd-will tradition that he regarded as irrelevant to his immediate concern.

4.1.2 Al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933) on the Authority of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Dāwūd al-Baghdādī (d. 280/893–4)

The *matn* is identical to the one found in Ibn Saʻd and Ibn Ḥanbal, with a few minor differences,³⁴ and one major difference. The major difference is the

33 Al-Marwazī, *Sunna*, 75, no. 261. Here the Prophet set out to raid Khaybar. Clearly, a later copyist mistook *Khaybar* for *Hunayn*. The consonantal skeleton of the two words is nearly identical.

34 Al-Ṭahāwī, *Sharḥ Mushkil al-āthār*, 13:221, no. 5223.

omission of clause 2c, in which Sa‘d asks the Prophet if he might bequeath half (*shāṭr*) of his wealth. We have already observed that both this and clause 2b (two-thirds) are absent in the version recorded by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Qādī. The absence of clause 2c in al-Ṭahāwī suggests that ‘Affān b. Muslim’s tradition may not have included this clause; whether or not this is the case remains to be determined based on a comparison with the other traditions passing through ‘Affān.

4.1.3 Al-Haythamī (d. 807/1404–5) → al-Bazzār (d. 292/904–5) → Aḥmad
b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī → ‘Affān b. Muslim

In his *Musnad*, the Basran scholar Aḥmad b. ‘Amr al-Bazzār (d. ca 292/905) recorded many traditions that are not found in the six *ḥadīth* collections that subsequently came to be regarded as canonical by Sunnis.³⁵ Over half a millennium later, these extra-canonical traditions (known as *zawā’id*) were compiled in a separate collection by the Cairene scholar Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī (d. 807/1405).³⁶ Here al-Haythamī cites a variant of the Sa‘d-will tradition without, however, identifying any intermediate link between himself and al-Bazzār. Curiously, this tradition is not found in the extant text of al-Bazzār’s *Musnad*.³⁷

- 1a. *Anna rasūl^a ’l-lāhⁱ (ṣ) qadima Makkat^a fa-khalla fa Sa‘d^{an} hīn^a kharaja ilā Hunayn*
- 1b. *fa-lammā faragha min al-Ji‘irrānatⁱ mu‘tamir^{an} dakhala ‘alay-hi wa-huwa marīd^{un}*
- 2a. *Fa-qāla [Sa‘d]: “Inna liya māl^{an} wa-inna-mā yarithu-nī kalālat^{un} a-fa-ūṣī bi-mālī kullī-hi aw ataṣadda qu bi-hi?” Qāla [rasūl^u ’l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: “Lā.”*
- 2b. *Qāla [Sa‘d]: “A-fa-ataṣadda qu bi-thuluthay-hi?” Qāla [rasūl^u ’l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: “Lā.”*
- 2c. *Qāla [Sa‘d]: “Fa-bi-shatrⁱ-hi?” Qāla [rasūl^u ’l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: “Lā.”*
- 2d. *Qāla [Sa‘d]: “Fa-ataṣadda qu bi-thuluthⁱ-hi?” Qāla [rasūl^u ’l-lāhⁱ]: “Na‘am wa-dhālikā kathīr^{un}”*

³⁵ By the end of the fourth/tenth century, Sunnis had come to regard the *ḥadīth* collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Nasā’ī as canonical. In the following century, the collections of al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Māja were added to the list of canonical collections, which came to be known as ‘the Six Books’ (*al-kutub al-sitta*) (on the process of canonization, see Brown, *Hadīth*, 38–9).

³⁶ Al-Haythamī, *Kashf*, 2:140, no. 1383.

³⁷ The absence of this tradition in al-Bazzār’s *Musnad* suggests that al-Haythamī either worked with a different version of this text or found the tradition in another text. Further work is required on the relationship between al-Haythamī’s *Kashf* and al-Bazzār’s *Musnad*.

3a. Qāla [Sa'd]: “Innī yā rasūl^a ‘l-lāhⁱ akhāfu an udfana fī-hā aw fī ‘l-mawdīⁱ ‘l-ladī kharajtu min-hu muhājir^{an}.” Qāla [rasūl^u ‘l-lāhⁱ]: “Lā innī la-arjū an yarfa‘a-ka ‘l-lāh^u – ya‘nī “fa-yunfa‘a bi-ka aqwām^{un} wa-yuḍarrā bi-ka ākhārūna yā ‘Amr!”

3b. In māta Sa'd^{un} hā-hunā fa-'dfin-hu naḥw^a ṭarīqⁱ ‘l-madīnatⁱ – wa-ashāra bi-yadī-hi hā-kadhā.

The tradition transmitted by al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār differs in several respects from the other traditions transmitted on the authority of ‘Affān b. Muslim:

1. The most notable difference relates to the word *kalāla*. In the traditions examined above, Sa'd says *ūrathu kalālat^{an}* (“I am inherited in the state of having no parent or child”). Here the word *kalāla* refers to the deceased, that is to say, to Sa'd himself. In the *matn* recorded by al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār, Sa'd says *inna-mā yarithu-nī kalālat^{un}* (“I will be inherited by someone other than a parent or child”) – here the word *kalāla* refers to the heirs, whoever they might be.
2. In clause 1b, al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār has *fa-lammā faragha min al-Ji‘irrānatⁱ* instead of *fa-lammā qadima min al-Ji‘irrānatⁱ*, as in the other traditions through ‘Affān b. Muslim. In the same clause, al-Haythamī has *wa-huwa marīd^{un}*; the other traditions that pass through ‘Affān b. Muslim all have *wa-huwa waji‘un maghlūb*. The use of the verb *faragha* is a unique feature of al-Haythamī's *matn*. Elsewhere, the clause *wa-huwa marīd^{un}* is found once in the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster and six times in the larger Sa'd will-cluster.³⁸
3. In clauses 2b and 2d, al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār uses the verb *tasaddaqa* (“to distribute as alms”) rather than *awṣā* (“to bequeath”).
4. Clause 2c in the tradition of al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār does not have a verb. This absence clearly sets it apart on stylistic grounds from the surrounding clauses. In a stylistically homogeneous text, one would expect to find grammatical parallelism. This stylistic inconsistency suggests that clause 2c was not part of the tradition received by al-Bazzār – or by his informant, Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh – from ‘Affān b. Muslim.
5. The wording of clause 3a recorded by al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār differs considerably from that of the other traditions on the authority of ‘Affān b. Muslim. At the beginning of the clause, Sa'd expresses his fear that he will be buried “in it” (*akhāfu an udfana fī-hā*), viz., Mecca. This wording points

³⁸ Zaman, “Evolution,” 218 (no. 55), 219 (no. 63), 220 (no. 64), 222 (no. 73), 225 (no. 88), and 228 (no. 103).

to influence from the group of traditions about the “three children of Sa‘d,”³⁹ which is part of the larger corpus of traditions about Sa‘d’s bequest.

Two of the above differences relate to legal substance: (1) the definition of *kalāla* and (2) alms vs. bequests; the others are less significant textual variations in the individual clauses of the *matn*. In combination, these differences constitute an anomalous deviation from the narrative patterns in the other *matns* that converge on ‘Affān b. Muslim. How are we to interpret this phenomenon? One might argue that the tradition recorded by al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār does not belong to ‘Affān’s cluster. Alternatively, it is possible that al-Bazzār’s original *matn* was similar to ‘Affān’s *matn*, but was modified during the course of its transmission to al-Haythamī. We can neither confirm nor reject either explanation on the basis of evidence found in the *isnāds*. Al-Haythamī does not identify the source from which he received al-Bazzār’s tradition. Below the level of al-Bazzār, the *isnād* passes through the otherwise unknown Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh. Thus, the anomalous *matn* found in the collection of al-Haythamī is attached to an equally anomalous *isnād*. Because of the resulting uncertainty, the tradition recorded by al-Haythamī must be discounted as evidence about the contents of ‘Affān b. Muslim’s version.

4.1.4 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr on the Authority of ‘Affān b. Muslim

The text of Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s tradition includes only clauses 1a, 1b and 2a of the Sa‘d-will tradition.⁴⁰

- 1a. *Anna rasūlā 'l-lāhⁱ (s) qadima Makkat^a 'ām^a 'l-fathⁱ fa-khallafa Sa‘d^{an} marīd^{an} hīn^a kharaja ilā Hunayn*
- 1b. *fa-lammā qadima min al-Jī'irrānatⁱ mu'tamir^{an} dakhala 'alay-hi wa-huwa wajī'un maghlūb^{un}*

39 The traditions attributed to the three children of Sa‘d highlight Sa‘d’s fear of dying in Mecca. The sentence *khashītu an amūta bi'l-arḍⁱ 'l-latī hājartu min-hā* (“I fear that I will die in the land from which I emigrated”) is one of the most stable narrative elements in these traditions (Zaman, “Evolution,” 169–71). This sentence no doubt influenced al-Bazzār’s formulation: *akhāfu an udfana fī-hā aw fī 'l-mawdīⁱ 'l-ladhi kharajtu min-hu muhājir^{an}* (“I fear that I will be buried in it or in the place from which I departed as an emigrant”).

40 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Tamhīd*, 8:376–7. Before citing clause 2a, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr states, *wa-dha-kara 'l-hadīth* (“and he mentioned [the rest] of the tradition”), indicating that he shortened the *matn*.

2a. *Fa-qāla [Sa'd]: "Yā rasūl^a 'l-lāhⁱ inna liya māl^{an} wa-innī ūrathu kalālat^{an} a-fa-ūṣī bi-mālī kullⁱ-hi aw ataṣṣaddaqū bi-mālī kullⁱ-hi?" Qāla [rasūl^u 'l-lāhⁱ (§)]: "Lā." wa-dhakara 'l-hadīth.*

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr specifies that the encounter between Sa'd and the Prophet occurred in the year of the conquest ('ām^a 'l-fatḥⁱ), after Muḥammad had entered Mecca in order to perform the 'umra or lesser pilgrimage. This chronological specification, which is not found in other traditions transmitted by 'Affān b. Muslim, must have been added to the latter's *matn* by one of the men who transmitted it to Ibn 'Abd al-Barr. Since the *isnād* that links Ibn 'Abd al-Barr to 'Affān does not include the names of one or more intermediate transmitters, it is impossible to determine either the chronology or the origin of his chronological specification.

4.1.5 Summary: 'Affān b. Muslim's Tradition

If we exclude from our analysis the anomalous tradition of al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār, we have established the following:

1. 'Affān b. Muslim is either the PCL or the CL in the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster. The text in boldface in *Matn-Composite 1* represents the most stable narrative elements that can be associated with 'Affān's version. These elements may be summarized as follows:
 - As he departs for Ḥunayn, the Prophet leaves behind Sa'd, who is sick (clause 1).
 - When he returns from Ji'irrāna to perform the lesser pilgrimage, the Prophet visits Sa'd, who is still sick and fears death (clause 2).
 - Sa'd refers to himself as a person who will die in the state of leaving persons other than a parent or child as his heirs (*ūrathu kalālat^{an}*) (clause 2a).
 - Sa'd negotiates with the Prophet about the percentage of his wealth that he might bequeath or distribute as alms. The Prophet agrees on one-third (clauses 2a and 2d).
 - Sa'd fears that he will die in the place from which he had emigrated and the Prophet expresses his hope that Allah will raise up Sa'd (clause 3a).
 - The Prophet instructs 'Amr b. al-Qārī that if Sa'd does in fact die in Mecca, he should be buried facing in the direction of Medina.
2. The following instances of textual fluidity impede our efforts to reconstruct several parts of the PCL tradition:

- It is not clear whether ‘Affān’s text included clauses 2b and 2c, in which Sa‘d asks if he might bequeath either two-thirds or one-half (*shatr*) of his wealth. Neither clause is present in the PCL tradition transmitted by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Qāḍī. Clause 2c is not part of al-Tahāwī’s *matn*. Both clauses are included in the *matns* recorded by Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Sa‘d, and al-Marwazī.⁴¹
- In clause 1a, al-Tahāwī and Ibn ‘Asākir insert the toponym *Mecca*. As these are late versions of the narrative, the word “Mecca” may not have been present in ‘Affān’s version.
- In clause 3a, four different expressions are used to describe Sa‘d’s fear of dying in Mecca: *a-mayyit^{un} anā* occurs twice and *amūtu*, *uṣību*, and *āmantu* are each used once. The similarity between the consonantal skeletons of *a-mayyit^{un}*, *āmantu*, and *uṣību* suggests that these three expressions are variants of a single skeletal form. We may exclude *āmantu* on the grounds that it does not make sense in this context and we may exclude *uṣību* on the grounds that it may signify wounding rather than death. That leaves *mayyit* as the likely original form. *Amūtu* is probably the *lectio facilior* of the grammatically anomalous clause, *a-mayyit^{un} anā*.
- A similar fluidity is observed in the Prophet’s reply to Sa‘d in clause 3. *Yanka‘a* is found in two traditions, while in the other traditions we find *yunka‘a*, *yukāda*, and *yusā‘a*. Frequency of use and priority of occurrence combine to suggest that the verb *naka‘a* was the original form.
- It is clear that, at the end of clause 3a, ‘Affān used a derivative of the stem *nf'*. It is impossible to determine if this derivative was *yantafī‘a* or *yanfa‘a/yunfa‘a*.
- In clause 3b, frequency of use and priority of occurrence suggest that ‘Affān preferred *fa-hā-hunā ‘dfin-hu* over *fa-‘dfin-hu hā-hunā*; he also used the adverbial preposition *naḥw^a* and the demonstrative pronoun *hā-kadħā*.

4.2 *Wuhayb b. Khālid*

Below ‘Affān b. Muslim, the *isnād* passes through the Basran Wuhayb b. Khālid (98–156/716/17–772/3). The only transmitter who cites Wuhayb is ‘Affān and

⁴¹ According to Zaman, the intermediate questions were not as significant as the legal outcome of the negotiations between Sa‘d and the Prophet (Zaman, “The Science of *Rijāl*,” 23–4). While this observation may be a valid explanation of the verbal fluidity observed in the negotiations section, it does not contribute to the reconstruction of the text at the level of the key figures.

there is no other line of transmission that would suggest that Wuhayb is the CL of the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster.

4.3 *Abd Allāh b. Uthmān b. Khuthaym al-Qārī*

Below Wuhayb b. Khālid, who was a Basran, the *isnād* passes through 'Abd Allāh b. Uthmān b. Khuthaym (d. ca 136/753 or 144/761–2), a Meccan whose scholarly career in all likelihood started sometime between 90 and 95 AH.⁴²

The only biographer who indicates that Wuhayb transmitted from Ibn Khuthaym is al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341), who appears to have inferred this relationship from the evidence of the *isnāds* found in the Six Books.⁴³ To the best of our knowledge, no other biographer indicates that Wuhayb transmitted from Ibn Khuthaym.

Apart from Wuhayb b. Khālid, Ibn Khuthaym is cited by al-Fākihī (on the authority of Abū Bishr → Ibn Abī 'l-Ḍayf) and by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr. He is also part of an *isnād* cluster that passes through Ibn Jurayj. We will discuss the latter cluster, which differs significantly from the traditions studied to this point, in section 4.4. Here we focus on the *matns* of al-Fākihī (through Abū Bishr → Ibn Abī 'l-Ḍayf) and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr.

Matn-Composite 2 (boldface indicates the shared elements of the narratives)

Traditions included in *Matn-Composite 2*

1 = Al-Fākihī → Ibn Khuthaym

2 = Ibn 'Abd al-Barr → Ibn Khuthaym

Matn-Composite

1a. *Anna [rasūla 'l-lāhⁱ (§)]¹ [al-nabi]² dakhala 'alā Sa'adⁱ bnⁱ Mālik [(rd) yawm^a 'l-fathⁱ wa-huwa bi-Makkat^a]¹ [ya'udu-hu wa-huwa marīq^{un}]²*

⁴² The biographical sources do not mention when Ibn Khuthaym was born or began to transmit *hadīth*. They do, however, specify that he studied with three scholars: Abū Ṭufayl, Sa'īd b. Jubayr, and Mujaḥid b. Jabr. Abū Ṭufayl reportedly was eight years old when the Prophet died in 11/632 and is said to have died ca 110/728–9 at the age of 107 (al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 3:467–70). Abū Ṭufayl's putative longevity raises doubts about his historicity. Sa'īd b. Jubayr died in 95/713–4 and Mujaḥid died between 100/718 and 104/722. Our suggestion that Ibn Khuthaym's scholarly career began between 90 and 95 AH is based on the assumption that Sa'īd b. Jubayr was Ibn Khuthaym's first teacher and that he studied with him shortly before Sa'īd's death in 95 AH.

⁴³ Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 31:165. Al-Mizzī compiled his biographical dictionary on the basis of the information included in *isnāds* in the Six Books and other collections (see *Tahdhīb*, 1:147–50); he ignored collections in which the *hadīth* are presented without *isnāds* (*ibid.*, 1:151).

- 1b. [wa-dhālīka]² **ba'da-mā** [‘nṭalaqa ilā Khaybar^a wa-]¹ **raja'a min al-Jī'irrānātī** [wa-'ind^a-hu 'Amr^u bn^u 'l-Qārī]¹ [wa-qasama 'l-ghanā'im^a wa-tāfa bi'l-bayt^t wa-sa'ā bayna 'l-ṣafā wa'l-Marwāt^t]²
- 2a. **Fa-qāla Sa'd** [(rd)¹]: “Yā rasūl^a 'l-lāhi inna liya māl^a kathīr^a wa-[inna warathatī]¹ [yūrithu-nī]² kalālat^{un} a-fa-ataşaddaqu bi-mālī kullī-hi?” Qāla [rasūl^u 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: “Lā.”
- 2b. **Qāla** [Sa'd]: “[A-fa-ataşaddaqu bi-shaṭrī-hi?]¹ [“Fa-bi-thuluthay-hi? ”]² Qāla [rasūl^u 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: “Lā.”
- 2c. **Qāla** [Sa'd]: “[A-fa-ataşaddaqu bi-thuluthī-hi?]¹ [“Fa-thuluthū-hu? ”]² Qāla [rasūl^u 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ)]: “Na'am.” [Qāla [rasūl^u 'l-lāhⁱ]]¹: “[Wa-dhālīka]² kathīr^{un}. ”
- 3a. [Thumma jahasha ilay-hi Sa'd (rd) fa-qāla: “Yā rasūl^a 'l-lāhⁱ amūtu bi'l-arḍⁱ 'l-latī kharajtu min-hā min al-shirkⁱ muhājir^a? ”] Qāla [rasūl^u 'l-lāhⁱ] (ṣ): “Innī la-arjū an yarfa'a-ka 'l-lāh^u fa-yanka'a bi-ka aqwām^a wa-yarfa'a bi-ka ākharīna]¹
- 3b. [Yā 'Amr^u bn^a 'l-Qārī]¹ [wa-'an 'Abd Allāh b. Uthmān b. Khuthaym 'an Ubayd Allāh b. Iyād 'an abī-hi 'an jaddī-hi 'Amrⁱ bnⁱ al-Qārī anna-hu samī'a rasūl^a 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ) qāla:]² **in māta Sa'd^u** [b. Mālik]¹ [bi-Makkat^a]² **fa-'dfin-hu hā-hunā** wa-ashāra (ṣ) **nahw^a** [‘aqabatī 'l-madaniyīna]¹ [*tarīqⁱ 'l-Madīnatⁱ*]².

At first glance, the differences between these texts suggest that they do not share a common source – presumably Ibn Khuthaym. However, close examination reveals that they do share several important linguistic elements (indicated by boldface in *Matn-Composite 2*), which suggests that they were part of a single cluster distinct from other clusters of traditions about Sa'd. In our view, these linguistic similarities are signs of common origin in a proto-text put into circulation by Ibn Khuthaym. We shall now attempt to reconstruct that proto-text.

In clause 1a of the traditions recorded by al-Fākihī and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, the Prophet pays a visit to Sa'd.⁴⁴ Otherwise the traditions differ in three respects: in al-Fākihī's tradition through Abū Bishr → Ibn Abī 'l-Dayf → Ibn Khuthaym, the visit takes place (1) in Mecca, (2) on the day that it was conquered, but (3) it does not mention Sa'd's illness. In Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's tradition, Sa'd is ill, but the

⁴⁴ Note that al-Fākihī and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr both identify Sa'd as “the son of Mālik,” whereas elsewhere in the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster he is identified as “the son of Abī Waqqāṣ.” This is not a problem: Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ was the son of Mālik b. Wuhayb (or Uhayb) (Hawting, “Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ,” *EI*²). His identification as “the son of Mālik” most likely reflects Ibn Khuthaym's personal preference regarding Sa'd's name.

text does not specify the time or location of the event, which are implied, however, in clause 1b. Al-Fākihi's formulation suggests that the illness motif was not part of the text transmitted by Ibn Khuthaym. If so, this motif would have been added to Ibn Khuthaym's tradition during the course of what Speight calls "a horizontal development."⁴⁵

It is possible, however, that Ibn Khuthaym's tradition did include the illness motif. It will be noted that, in the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster, Sa'd is not explicitly described as being on the point of death. Conversely, many traditions in the larger Sa'd-will cluster, especially those attributed to Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri, specify that Sa'd was on the point of death.⁴⁶ The absence of that specification in the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster signals the antiquity of the illness motif, and, hence, the possibility that it was part of the early narrative transmitted by Ibn Khuthaym, who was a contemporary of al-Zuhri.⁴⁷

The traditions recorded by al-Fākihi and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr on the authority of Ibn Khuthaym agree on an important point: in clause 2a, Sa'd asks the Prophet if he may distribute all of his wealth as alms, without mentioning a bequest. Some 50 to 100 years later, in 'Affān b. Muslim's *matn*, we find a reference to both a bequest and to the distribution of alms. Now, Ibn Khuthaym was one of the sources relied upon by 'Affān b. Muslim (see Figure 6.1). This suggests that either 'Affān or his immediate informant Wuhayb b. Khālid added the reference to a bequest to the tradition he received from Ibn Khuthaym.⁴⁸

45 Speight, "The Will," 251–2.

46 The traditions in the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster usually describe Sa'd as *waji'un maghlūb* (suffering, overcome [by his illness]), but do not state that he was on the point of death. A comparison with Zaman's traditions nos. 1–45 ("Evolution," 199–215) – attributed to al-Zuhri – shows that 25 of them (nos. 1–12, 14–22, 38–40 and 42) describe Sa'd as being on the point of death (*ashfaytu/ashfā' alā 'l-mawt'*), whereas 14 (nos. 23–36) clearly define his health situation as grave (*ishtadda bī 'l-marad*).

47 Note that, in clause 1a, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr has *dakhala ya'ūdu-hu wa-huwa marīd*^{un} ("he came to pay a sick-visit to him while he was ill") (see *Matn-Composite 2*). The verb *'āda* ("to pay a sick-visit"), which is not found in the other traditions in the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster, is frequently used in traditions on the authority of al-Zuhri (see again Zaman's nos. 1–45). The limits of the present study do not allow us to reconstruct the wording of the illness motif in the al-Zuhri cluster or to compare it with the corresponding motif in the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster. Such a comparison would help scholars to determine whether, in describing Sa'd's illness, one of the two narratives is dependent on the other, or both derive from an earlier proto-narrative.

48 'Affān b. Muslim – or Wuhayb b. Khālid – may have had in mind that a gift made during death-sickness is subject to the same limitations as a bequest (see Coulson, *Succession*, 267). Alternatively, 'Affān may have used the verb *taṣaddaqā* here as a synonym for "to bequeath" (see Powers, "On Bequests," 190, and notes 39–40).

However, there are three important objections to this line of reasoning. First, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr and al-Fākihī both rely on single-strand *isnāds* and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr does not mention any intermediate transmitters between himself and Ibn Khuthaym (see Figure 6.1). It is therefore possible that what began as a reference to a bequest in Ibn Khuthaym’s text was changed to the distribution of alms as the tradition made its way to Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr and al-Fākihī. Second, Ibn Khuthaym uses the term *kalāla*, which played an important role in the emergence of Islamic inheritance law, but has no apparent connection to the distribution of alms. Third, in ‘Affān b. Muslim’s tradition, it is only in clause 2a that Sa‘d mentions alms (“may I bequeath my wealth or distribute it as alms?”), whereas during the continuation of his conversation with the Prophet, he asks only if he might bequeath his wealth. This suggests that the phrase “or distribute it as alms” was a later addition to Ibn Khuthaym’s tradition.

Also problematic in Ibn Khuthaym’s text is the word *kalāla*. In ‘Affān b. Muslim’s tradition (indicated by boldface in *Matn-Composite 1*), Sa‘d states that he will die in a state of being inherited by someone other than a parent or child (*ūrathu kalālat^{an}*); in the traditions recorded by al-Fākihī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr on the authority Ibn Khuthaym (*Matn-Composite 2*), Sa‘d states that his heirs will be persons other than a parent or child (*warathati/yarithu-nī kalālat^{un}*). Although both statements have the same legal implications, they refer to two alternative definitions of *kalāla*: according to one, the word refers to the status of the deceased at the time of his death; according to the other, the word refers to the heirs, that is to say, it is a kinship term signifying “distant relatives.” Pavlovitch has recently demonstrated that the former definition (“a person who dies leaving neither child nor parent”) emerged in the Hijaz in the first half of the second century AH, while the latter (“those [relatives] apart from a child and parent”) emerged almost simultaneously in Kufa.⁴⁹

If Pavlovitch is correct, then we must account for the following discrepancy. Whereas the PCL, ‘Affān b. Muslim, who was active in Baghdad, held the Hijazi position, the CL, Ibn Khuthaym, who lived in Mecca, held the Kufan position (as reported by al-Fākihī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr). While it is possible that these two positions passed back and forth between the Hijaz and Iraq,⁵⁰ the evidence of the *isnāds* is insufficient to determine the chronology of that back-and-forth movement. The fact that ‘Affān b. Muslim, al-Fākihī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr all rely on single-strand *isnāds* to Ibn Khuthaym makes it difficult to reconstruct Ibn Khuthaym’s definition of *kalāla* and to identify the transmitter who changed

49 Pavlovitch, “Some Sunnī *Hadīth*,” 107–16, 129–37, 157.

50 On the “travelling tradition” as a criterion for dating Islamic traditions, see Sadeghi, “The Travelling Tradition,” 207–13.

the wording of the CL. Be that as it may, we may confidently assert the following: (1) Ibn Khuthaym used the word *kalāla*, and (2) despite the fact that this word has two different significations in different versions of the tradition, the underlying legal substance of the term is apparently the same.

Al-Fākihī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr have two different versions of clause 2b: in the former, Sa‘d asks if he may bequeath half (*shatr*) of his wealth; in the latter, Sa‘d asks if he may bequeath two-thirds of his wealth. In clause 2c, these two collectors agree that Sa‘d asks if he may bequeath one-third of his wealth, although their respective formulations of this question differ. Because of the substantial difference between clauses 2b and 2c in al-Fākihī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, on the one hand, and ‘Affān b. Muslim, on the other, it is impossible to prove that the intermediate proportions (two-thirds, one-half) were part of Ibn Khuthaym’s tradition.

As for clause 3, the tradition recorded by al-Fākihī shares several common elements with our reconstruction of ‘Affān b. Muslim’s tradition (boldface in *Matn-Composite 1*). Clearly, the two traditions share a common source. The similarity is especially noticeable in the second half of clause 3a, where the Prophet expresses the wish that God would raise up Sa‘d so that he might benefit some people and harm others. By contrast, clause 3b of Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s tradition through Ibn Khuthaym is exceptional: unlike the other traditions studied to this point, in which the burial motif is part of the Sa‘d-will cluster, in Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr it is an independent tradition with its own single-strand *isnād*: Ibn Khuthaym → ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Iyād → his father → his grandfather, ‘Amr b. al-Qārī. Even though this *isnād* is identical to the *isnād* attached to the Sa‘d-will tradition in Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, we cannot discount the possibility that Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr may have split the text into two because he suspected that during the lifetime of Ibn Khuthaym they were two independent traditions.

4.4 *Ibn Jurayj*

Matn-Composite 3 (boldface indicates the common parts of the narrative)

The traditions included in *Matn-Composite 3*:

1 = ‘Abd al-Razzāq → Ibn Jurayj

2 = Al-Azraqī → his grandfather → Muslim b. Khālid → Ibn Jurayj

3 = Al-Fākihī → Maymūn b. al-Ḥakam → Muḥammad b. Ju’shum → Ibn Jurayj

Matn-Composite

1a. *Anna Sa‘d^a bn^a Abī Waqqāṣ [(rd)]³ iṣhtakā khilāfa [‘l-nabī (ṣ)]^{1, 3} [‘l-rasūl(ṣ)]² bi-Makkat^a hīn^a dhahaba [‘l-nabī (ṣ)]^{1, 3} ilā ‘l-Ṭā’if*

ib. *fa-lammā raja'a [‘l-nabī (ṣ)]² qāla [‘l-nabī (ṣ)]¹, ³ li-‘Amrⁱ bnⁱ ‘l-Qārī: “In māta fa-hā-hunā” wa-ashāra [la-hu]² [(ṣ)]³ ilā ṭarīqⁱ ‘l-Madīnatⁱ*

Our assumption that ‘Affān b. Muslim’s tradition was a composite text finds support in a group of short traditions that treat the location of Sa‘d’s burial (see left half of Figure 6.1). Most of these short traditions pass through Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767–8), who is a key figure, and, as we shall demonstrate, the CL. The version recorded by ‘Abd al-Razzāq reads as follows (see *Matn-Composite 3*):

- 1a. **Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ suffered [from an illness] while the Prophet (ṣ) was absent from Mecca when the Prophet went to [raid] al-Ṭā’if.⁵¹**
- 1b. **Upon his return, the Prophet (ṣ) said to ‘Amr b. al-Qārī: “If he dies, then [bury him] over there,” and he pointed in the direction of Medina.⁵²**

The *matns* recorded by al-Azraqī⁵³ and al-Fākihī⁵⁴ who are separated from Ibn Jurayj by two levels of transmission, are both virtually identical to the *matn* recorded by ‘Abd al-Razzāq, who cites Ibn Jurayj directly. It is possible that either al-Azraqī or al-Fākihī – or both – copied ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s tradition while constructing an “independent” *isnād*.

We hesitate to dismiss al-Azraqī’s *isnād* as a fabrication, however, because there is a significant difference between it and other *isnāds*. Whereas ‘Abd al-Razzāq and al-Fākihī transmit through Ibn Jurayj → Ibn Khuthaym → Nāfi‘ b. Sarjis, al-Azraqī’s transmission ends with Ibn Jurayj, who does not specify the name of his informant, but rather says, “It was related to me that” (“*ḥuddithu anna*”). One might argue that al-Azraqī sought to avoid the obscure Ibn Sarjis.⁵⁵ This argument is undermined by the fact that al-Azraqī cites Ibn Sarjis in the immediately following tradition, in which Ibn Sarjis recalls that he visited the Companion Abū Wāqid al-Laythī (d. 68/687–8) shortly before the latter died

⁵¹ Immediately following his victory over the tribal confederation of Hawāzin in the valley of Ḥunayn in Shawwāl 8/January 630, the Prophet is said to have laid siege to al-Ṭā’if, but he lifted the siege soon thereafter when his troops failed to breach the city defenses (see Buhl, F.-[Alford T. Welch], “Muhammad,” *EI*²).

⁵² ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 3:577, no. 6728.

⁵³ Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār*, 2:212.

⁵⁴ Al-Fākihī, *Akhbār*, 4:65, no. 2387.

⁵⁵ Only a few biographers mention Ibn Sarjis and the information that they provide may be summed up as follows: Ibn Sarjis was born and lived in the Hijaz, he transmitted *hadīth* from the Companion Abū Wāqid al-Laythī, and he was an informant of Ibn Khuthaym (al-Bukhārī, *Tārikh*, 8:84; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Ilal*, 2:82, no. 1620; 3:104, no. 4405; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarh*, 8:452–3; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt*, 5:468).

in Mecca, adding that Abū Wāqid was buried in the “graves of the emigrants at Fakhkh.”⁵⁶ In his tradition about Sa‘d’s illness, al-Azraqī apparently preserved the original version of the *isnād* that ends at the level of Ibn Jurayj, who should be considered the CL of what we call the “burial-motif.”⁵⁷ It is impossible to determine whether a tradition about Abū Wāqid al-Laythī’s final illness served as a model for Ibn Jurayj’s tradition about Sa‘d’s final illness, or vice-versa.⁵⁸ The fact that the *isnād* is *munqaṭi‘* or interrupted between Ibn Jurayj and Sa‘d points to either the antiquity of the tradition or to an attempt to mask its provenance. In either case, this defective *isnād* was subsequently improved by inserting the names of Ibn Khuthaym and Nāfi‘ b. Sarjis.

The formulation of Ibn Jurayj’s tradition, as found in ‘Abd al-Razzāq, al-Azraqī and al-Fākihī (*Matn-Composite 3*), differs from that of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870):

- 1a. *Anna ḥ-l-nabiyy^a* (§) *dakhala ‘alā Sa‘d yawm^a ḥ-l-fathⁱ*
- 1b. *fa-qāla: “Yā ‘Amr^u bn^a ḥ-l-Qārī in māta Sa‘d^{un} fa-‘dfin-hu naḥw^a ṭarīqⁱ ḥ-l-Madīnat.”*

- 1a. The Prophet (§) entered upon Sa‘d on the day of the conquest [of Mecca]
- 1b. and [the Prophet (§)] said: “O ‘Amr b. al-Qārī, if Sa‘d dies, then bury him facing the road to Medina.”⁵⁹

In al-Bukhārī’s *matn*, the formulation of clause 1b is very close to that of clause 1b in ‘Abd al-Razzāq, al-Azraqī, and al-Fākihī respectively.⁶⁰ In clause 1a,

⁵⁶ Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār*, 2:212. Fakhkh is the name of a valley near Mecca (Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-buldān*, 4:237).

⁵⁷ With regard to Ibn Jurayj’s tradition, we prefer “burial motif” over “*hijra* concern,” for two reasons: (1) his tradition draws attention to the location of Sa‘d’s burial; (2) it does not contain any reference to the term *hijra* or any derivative of the root *h-j-r*.

⁵⁸ Deathbed narratives are a common *topos* in the second century AH. For instance, the Prophet is said to have expressed his desire to write a document during the illness from which he died; Abū Bakr appointed ‘Umar as his successor shortly before he died; and ‘Umar dealt with several important issues on his deathbed, including *kalāla* and the appointment of his successor (*khilāfa*) (see Powers, *Studies*, 113–23; Powers, *Muhammad*, 243ff.).

⁵⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Tārīkh*, 6:311.

⁶⁰ Note that in clause 1b the Prophet’s statement is formulated as direct speech in al-Bukhārī’s tradition (“O ‘Amr b. al-Qārī, bury him facing in the direction of Medina”), but as a combination of direct and indirect speech in ‘Abd al-Razzāq, al-Azraqī, and al-Fākihī (“O ‘Amr b. al-Qārī, if he dies, then [bury him] here” – and he pointed in the direction of Medina). The

however, al-Bukhārī specifies that the encounter between Sa‘d and the Prophet took place on the very day on which Mecca was “opened” or conquered (*yawm a‘l-fath*¹) rather than a month or so later, when the Prophet returned to Mecca following the unsuccessful siege of al-Tā’if. It also will be noted that al-Bukhārī has a collective *isnād*. His main line of transmission is as follows:

1. Al-Qāsim b. Yahyā → Ibn Khuthaym → ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Iyād b. ‘Amr → his father [‘Iyād] → his grandfather [‘Amr].

This is followed by:

2. Muḥammad b. Yazīd → ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Iyād b. ‘Amr → his father [‘Iyād] → his grandfather [‘Amr]; and
3. Ibn Jurayj → Ibn Khuthaym.

Although al-Bukhārī states that these *isnāds* are attached to traditions that are similar (*mithl*) to one another, we cannot be sure that they were in fact identical, nor can we say anything about any differences between and among them. It is possible that al-Bukhārī was not concerned about the fact that in his tradition the encounter between Sa‘d and the Prophet took place “on the day of conquest,” whereas in Ibn Jurayj’s tradition the encounter took place approximately one month later. An alternative explanation will be raised in section 5.2. Al-Bukhārī’s third *isnād* points to a stage of development in which al-Azraqī’s original *isnād*, which ended with Ibn Jurayj, already included Ibn Khuthaym, but did not yet include the obscure figure Ibn Sarjis.

The substantive differences between al-Bukhārī’s tradition and that of ‘Abd al-Razzāq, al-Fākihī, and al-Azraqī do not undermine Ibn Jurayj’s status as the CL of the burial motif. In our view, the burial motif was an independent tradition that was put into circulation by Ibn Jurayj sometime between 100 and 150 AH.

4.5 *Ibn Khuthaym’s Original Matn*

Our hypothesis that the narrative transmitted by Ibn Khuthaym did not include the burial motif (see end of Section 4.3) finds support in a short tradition transmitted by Ibn Jurayj (see Section 4.4) in which the Prophet explains that if Sa‘d were to die in Mecca, he should be buried facing in the direction of Medina.

absence of an explicit subject (Sa‘d) in the latter three traditions, the omission of the verb (“to bury”), and the stylistic heterogeneity (a combination of direct and indirect speech), all suggest that these traditions are earlier than al-Bukhārī’s.

There is no mention of a bequest here. Compared to the corresponding section in our reconstruction of ‘Affān b. Muslim’s tradition (see again, boldface in *Matn-Composite 1*), the burial motif in Ibn Jurayj’s tradition is both shorter and stylistically simpler. Initially, the *isnād* of Ibn Jurayj’s tradition terminated at the level of Ibn Jurayj himself; at a later date, however, the names of Ibn Khuthaym and Nāfi‘ b. Sarjis were added below his level. On the strength of this evidence, we conclude that Ibn Jurayj transmitted a tradition that subsequently gave rise to clause 3 in the Sa‘d-will tradition, which combines the burial motif with Sa‘d’s explicit concern about dying in Mecca after having left it as an emigrant (*muhājir*).

Although both Ibn Khuthaym and Ibn Jurayj were Meccans, it is unlikely that it was Ibn Khuthaym who added the burial motif to the narrative about the exchange between the Prophet and Sa‘d about the size of the latter’s bequest.⁶¹ In all likelihood, this motif was added to the narrative by either ‘Affān b. Muslim or by his informant Wuhayb b. Khālid.

Based on our analysis of Ibn Khuthaym’s tradition in section 4.3 and of Ibn Jurayj’s tradition in section 4.4, we tentatively propose that Ibn Khuthaym’s original tradition would have included the following narrative elements:

1	<i>anna rasūl^a ’l-lāhⁱ/al-nabī (ṣ) dakhala</i>	The Messenger of Allah/the Prophet paid a visit to Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqās
2	<i>’alā Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqās</i>	
2	<i>Qadima/raja‘a min [al-]Ji‘irrānatⁱ</i>	He came/returned from [al-] Ji‘irrāna
3	<i>fa-qāla [Sa‘d]: “Yā rasūl^a ’l-lāhⁱ inna liya māl^{an} wa-inna warathati kalālat^{un}/</i>	whereupon [Sa‘d] said: “O Messenger of Allah, I have wealth and my heirs are/I
	<i>yarithu-nī kalālat^{un} a-fa-ūṣi bi-mālī</i>	will be inherited by relatives other than parent and child. May I bequeath all of my wealth?” [The Messenger of Allah]
	<i>kulli-hi?” qāla [rasūl^u ’l-lāhⁱ]: “lā.”</i>	said: “No.”
4	<i>qāla [Sa‘d]: “Thuluth^u-hu?” Qāla</i>	[Sa‘d] asked: “A third of it?” [The
	<i>[rasūl^u ’l-lāhⁱ]: “na‘am kathīr^{un}”</i>	Messenger of Allah said]: “Yes, [and that is] a lot.”

⁶¹ Ibn Khuthaym (d. ca 136 or 144) was probably one generation older than Ibn Jurayj (d. 150). There is no evidence of *hadīth* transmission between the two. Al-Mizzī (*Tahdhīb*, 15:279–80), who provides a long list of Ibn Khuthaym’s sources, does not mention Ibn Jurayj as one of them; conversely, al-Bukhārī (*Tārīkh*, 6:402–3), who provides a long list of Ibn Jurayj’s sources, does not mention Ibn Khuthaym.

4.6 *'Ubayd Allāh b. Iyād b. 'Amr b. al-Qārī*

Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) cites a single-strand *isnād* that connects directly with 'Ubayd Allāh b. Iyād b. 'Amr b. al-Qārī (Figure 6.1):

- 1a. *Anna rasūl^a 'l-lāhⁱ (ṣ) qadima Makkat^a wa-khallafa Sa'ḍ^an marīq^an hīn^a kharaja ilā Ḥunayn*
- 1b. *fa-lammā qadima min al-Ji'irrānatⁱ mu'tamir^an dakhala 'alay-hi wa-huwa wajī'un maghlūb^{un}*
- 2a. *Fa-qāla [Sa'ḍ]: "Yā rasūl^a 'l-lāhⁱ inna liya māl^an" wa-dhakara 'l-hadīth al-waṣīyya fi 'l-thuluth.⁶²*

We cannot say anything about 'Ubayd Allāh's status, for two reasons. First, Ibn al-Athīr's tradition is very short. It includes only clauses 1a and 1b and part of clause 2a (he may have shortened the *isnād* as well). It will be noted that these three clauses are similar to the corresponding clauses in Ibn Sa'ḍ and Ibn Ḥanbal (see *Matn-Composite 1*). This correspondence suggests that Ibn al-Athīr relied on the traditions recorded in those texts. Second, the historicity of the *isnād* below Ibn Khuthaym – who is the CL of the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster – is dubious. As noted, biographical information about the otherwise obscure Companion 'Amr b. al-Qārī is exiguous (see the beginning of Section 4). We know even less about 'Amr's son Iyād: the biographers provide no information except for their family relationship.⁶³ In addition, there is considerable variation among the *hadīth* collectors with regard to the name of 'Amr b. al-Qārī's grandson: eight collectors identify him as 'Amr b. al-Qārī – the same name as his grandfather;⁶⁴ two identify him as 'Ubayd Allāh b. Iyād b. 'Amr b. al-Qārī;⁶⁵ Ibn al-Athīr identifies him as 'Amr b. Iyād al-Qārī; al-Bayhaqī identifies him as 'Amr b. 'Abd al-Qārī; and, finally, al-Suyūṭī mentions 'Amr b. al-Qārī without specifying if he is referring to the grandfather or the grandson. The biographical dictionaries mention that 'Amr b. al-Qārī had only one grandson, whom they identify as 'Ubayd Allāh b. Iyād, albeit without linking him to a

⁶² Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 4:237.

⁶³ Biographical information about Iyād b. 'Amr may be summed up as follows: he transmitted traditions from his father and his son 'Ubayd Allāh transmitted traditions from him (al-Bukhārī, *Tārīkh*, 7:24; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ*, 6:409; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt*, 7:283–4).

⁶⁴ The eight collectors are Ibn Sa'ḍ, Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Marwazī, Abū Nu'aym, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (in his *Tamhīd*), Ibn 'Asākir, al-Taḥāwī, and al-Haythamī/al-Bazzār.

⁶⁵ These two collectors are al-Fākihi and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (in his *Istidhkār*).

tradition about Sa‘d’s bequest, and they appear to be confused about ‘Ubayd Allāh’s transmission from his ancestors.⁶⁶

There may be a solution to the confusion over the name of ‘Amr b. al-Qārī’s grandson. Let us assume that, below Ibn Khuthaym, there was at first only one person in the *isnād*, a certain ‘Amr b. al-Qārī. Let us further assume that this ‘Amr b. al-Qārī was not thought to have been a Companion or a direct eyewitness to the exchange between Sa‘d and the Prophet. Over time, as the importance of the direct eyewitnessing of a particular saying of the Prophet increased, the traditionists began to identify this ‘Amr b. al-Qārī as a Companion who did in fact witness the verbal exchange between Sa‘d and the Prophet. That is to say, they transformed the otherwise obscure ‘Amr b. al-Qārī into an equally obscure Companion with the same name. To distinguish between the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī who was Ibn Khuthaym’s source and the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī who was a Companion, the traditionists created a son for the Companion, whose name – ‘Iyād – was inserted between the names of his “father,” ‘Amr b. al-Qārī and his “son,” also ‘Amr b. al-Qārī. Due to the vagaries of oral transmission, ‘Amr b. al-Qārī the grandson was sometimes identified as ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Iyād, thereby creating an entirely new transmitter. At present, we cannot say who may have introduced these changes. We do know, however, that Ibn Khuthaym was a member of the clan of al-Qāra, the same clan to which ‘Amr b. al-Qārī belonged.⁶⁷ He therefore had a motive to cite a person from his tribe, who was probably the original ‘Amr b. al-Qārī.

5 Beyond ICMA

Our analysis of the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster using ICMA takes us back only as far as Ibn Khuthaym, who died *ca* 136/754 or in 140/757.⁶⁸ Similarly, our analysis of the burial motif using ICMA takes us back only as far as Ibn Jurayj, who died in 150/767–8. Thus, ICMA takes us back to the second quarter of the second century AH.

⁶⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Tārīkh*, 5:393; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ*, 5:329; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 19:139–40; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 7:43. Al-Bukhārī refers to ‘Ubayd Allāh’s father as ‘Iyād al-Qārī and to ‘Iyād’s father as al-Qārī [sic!]. Ibn Abī Ḥātim does not identify Ubayd Allāh’s father or grandfather as his informants.

⁶⁷ Ibn Sa‘d, *Tabaqāt*, 8:49.

⁶⁸ The biographers know little about Ibn Khuthaym, who is said to have died *ca* 136/753 or in 144/761–2. None of the biographers who lived in third and fourth centuries AH mentions ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Iyād b. ‘Amr b. al-Qārī as one of Ibn Khuthaym’s informants.

As noted at the end of Section 3, it is not possible, using only ICMA, to establish the historicity of an *isnād* or to reconstruct the wording of a tradition below the CL. Other techniques may be used, however, to recover the history of the narrative below the CL. In the present instance, there are three types of evidence that may shed light on the earliest history of the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster, one relating to the meaning of a difficult word (*kalāla*), another relating to a legal obligation (emigration), and a third relating to the prediction about Sa‘d’s future.

5.1 *Kalāla*

The meaning of a word may change over time. If so, the use of such a word in a tradition may serve as an important indicator of chronology, making it possible to identify the general period in which the tradition was put into circulation.⁶⁹

The word *kalāla* occurs twice in the Qur‘ān, once in the second half of Q 4.12 (hereinafter 4.12b) and again in 4.176.⁷⁰ The sources indicate that the meaning of this word was the subject of considerable confusion and no small measure of controversy during the century following the death of the Prophet, and that considerable time passed before a consensus developed regarding its meaning.⁷¹ It is therefore noteworthy that the word *kalāla* is found in all of the traditions in the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster. In version 17 of Speight’s corpus, Sa‘d uses the expression *ūrathu kalālatan*, which is clearly related to *yūrathu kalālatan* in Q 4.12b – as noted by Powers in 1983. It was for this reason that Powers concluded, at that time, that version 17 is “an early, and perhaps the earliest, version of the will concern.”⁷²

In 2009 Powers drew attention to BNF 328, a Qur‘ān manuscript that has been dated, on paleographic and codicological grounds, to the third quarter of the first century AH.⁷³ On folio 1ob of this manuscript, there is evidence of the

⁶⁹ For an example of this type of semantic development, see Christopher Melchert, “Qur‘ānic Abrogation,” 75–9. Melchert argues that the understanding of “*naskh*” in the writings of Abū Ubayd (d. 224/839), al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857–8), and Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) is not at the same level of theoretical sophistication as that of al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) in his *Risāla*. This suggests that the concept of *naskh*, as currently represented in the *Risāla*, was formulated at least half a century after the death of al-Shāfi‘ī (*ibid.*, 96).

⁷⁰ On *kalāla*, see Powers, “The Islamic Law of Inheritance Reconsidered”; Powers, *Studies*, 21–52; Powers, *Muhammad*, 155–224. See also Cilardo, *The Qur‘ānic Term Kalāla*; and Pavlovitch, “Some Sunnī Ḥadīth,” 86–159.

⁷¹ See, for example, Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1:460 (cited in Powers, *Studies*, 46–7).

⁷² Powers, “The Will,” 51; cf. Powers, *Studies*, 50.

⁷³ Deroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran*, 157.

manipulation of Q 4.12b. According to Powers, the original consonantal skeleton of *kalāla* would have been a hypothetical **kalla*, a kinship term signifying “daughter-in-law” that was part of the shared Semitic lexicon. If so, then the performed reading of **kalla* and the immediately preceding verb would have been **yūrithu kallat^{an}*, that is to say, “to designate a daughter-in-law as heir.”⁷⁴ At an early date following the death of the Prophet in 11/632, Powers suggested, the consonantal skeleton of **kalla* was changed to *kalāla* and the performed reading of the phrase in question was changed to *yūrathu kalālat^{an}*.

It was the secondary, revised version of this phrase that was encountered by the first Qur’ān exegetes who, understandably, experienced considerable difficulty making sense of it. Especially problematic was the word *kalāla* – a nonce word that has no cognate in any other Semitic language. Based solely on the use of this word in its Qur’ānic context, tentative definitions are said to have been put forward by long-lived Companions, Successors, and Followers.

Over time the early Muslim community conferred legitimacy on different attempts to define *kalāla* by attributing one or another definition of the word to either Abū Bakr or ‘Umar, with the result that it came to appear as if the two caliphs disagreed over its meaning. How to reconcile this inconsistency? One strategy was to invoke the authority of the Prophet himself. We suspect that this is why the phrases *ūrathu kalālat^{an}* (“I will die in a state of leaving neither parent nor child”) and *yarithunī kalālat^{un}* (“persons other than a parent or child will inherit from me”) were included in the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster. Whoever created this narrative conferred prophetic authority on this new word and its meaning in the Qur’ān by making Sa’d utter these words in the presence of the Prophet.

According to Powers, the understanding of *kalāla* developed in two stages: in the first cluster of traditions to emerge (Group A), the caliph ‘Umar either does not know or refuses to divulge the meaning of the word; in the second cluster (Group B), ‘Umar or Abū Bakr advances one or another specific – but inconsistent – definition of the word. According to Powers, the Group A traditions were put into circulation some time “in the second half of the first century AH,”⁷⁵ while the Group B traditions were put into circulation in “the last quarter of the 1st century or first decade of the 2nd century A.H.”⁷⁶ This chronology has recently been modified by Pavlovitch, who, using ICMA, has

74 Powers, *Muhammad*, 155–96.

75 Ibid., 219.

76 Ibid., 221.

established that these two competing definitions of *kalāla* emerged in the Hijaz and Kufa, respectively, in the first half of the second century AH.⁷⁷

5.2 *The Burial Motif*

Speight assumed that in his corpus of traditions the word *hijra*⁷⁸ refers to (1) migration from Mecca to Medina (2) during the lifetime of the Prophet.⁷⁹ It was this understanding of *hijra* that shaped the chronology that he proposed for what he called “the *hijra* concern.” In 1994, however, Crone argued that the idea of *hijra* underwent a dramatic semantic change: initially, the duty to emigrate was closely associated with *jihād* and that duty remained in effect so long as the Umayyad state continued to expand. When the conquests ended in the late Umayyad period, this understanding of the term was replaced by the idea that the duty to emigrate ceased upon the conquest of Mecca in 8/630. Crone calls the former understanding of *hijra* “open-ended” and the latter “closed.”⁸⁰

With a single exception, the traditions in our corpus link Sa‘d’s concern about the location of his burial with the Prophet’s return from the battle of Ḥunayn and the ensuing siege of al-Ṭā’if, one month *after* the conquest of Mecca. Thus, whoever formulated this tradition was clearly working within the framework of the open-ended understanding of the duty to emigrate; that is to say, he did not yet know that the duty to emigrate had ceased following the conquest of Mecca in 8/630.

Al-Bukhārī’s tradition, it will be recalled, is exceptional (see section 4.4). Unlike all other traditions in the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster, his clause 1a specifies

77 See Pavlovitch, “Some Sunnī *Hadīth*,” 107–16, 129–37, 157.

78 In Speight’s corpus, the term *hijra* is mentioned in tradition no. 18 (Speight, “The Will,” 264). In our corpus of seventeen traditions, the four traditions transmitted by Ibn Jurayj refer to the location of Sa‘d’s burial without mentioning *hijra*, while in the remaining 13 traditions, the idea of emigration is clearly implied in Sa‘d’s words “*kharajtu . . . muhājirān*,” even if the term *hijra* is not used.

79 Speight, “The Will,” 252, 267; cf. Zaman, “Evolution,” 18–19, 154–5, 183–4, 187.

80 Crone, “The First-Century Concept of *Hijra*,” 377–80, 383. Prior to Crone, Julius Wellhausen, Wilfred Madelung, Uri Rubin, Fred Donner, and others, had discussed the early, open-ended understanding of *hijra*. For a summary of this scholarship, see Crone, “The First-Century Concept of *Hijra*,” 352, 372. Previous scholars held that the closed concept of *hijra*, understood as a duty to emigrate from Mecca to Medina, emerged in the lifetime of the Prophet. This closed concept was suspended under the Umayyads and restored under the early Abbasids. By contrast, Crone argued that the closed concept was introduced for the first time under the Abbasids as a substitute for the original open-ended understanding of *hijra*, which had remained in force throughout the entire first century AH.

that the encounter between Sa‘d and the Prophet took place on the very day of the conquest of Mecca. By introducing this chronological specification, al-Bukhārī was no doubt attempting to harmonize the tension between two very different understandings of *hijra*, one open-ended, the other closed.

In his mind, the transition from the open-ended understanding to the closed understanding took place on the day of the conquest of Mecca. Thus, one might argue that, when the Prophet entered Mecca on the day of its conquest, the duty to engage in *hijra* remained in effect. This would explain why the Prophet instructed ‘Amr b. al-Qārī to bury Sa‘d facing in the direction of Medina. Later that day – and, critically, sometime after the Prophet’s encounter with Sa‘d – the duty to emigrate was abolished.⁸¹

Ibn Jurayj was active in the first half of the second century AH and his career therefore straddled the end of the Umayyad period and the beginning of the Abbasid period. He was no doubt working with the early, open-ended understanding of *hijra*. That is to say, in his mind, the conquest of Mecca had no effect whatsoever on the obligation to emigrate. For this reason, the “fact” that the encounter between Sa‘d and the Prophet took place one month after the conquest of Mecca was unproblematic.

Since the open-ended understanding of *hijra* remained in force until the overthrow of the Umayyads by the Abbasids in 132/750, this date marks the latest moment in time at which the *hijra* concern in the Sa‘d-will tradition would have been put into circulation. It also is consistent with our chronology, based on ICMA. During the last decade or two of the Umayyad period or the first decade of the Abbasid period, Ibn Jurayj put into circulation a tradition containing an early version of the burial motif.⁸² Sometime in the second half of the second century AH, this motif was added to the Sa‘d-will tradition, where the concern about emigration is explicitly articulated in Sa‘d’s statement that he was afraid to die in Mecca after having left it as an emigrant (*muhājirān*).

By the first half of the third century AH, the open-ended understanding of *hijra* had been replaced by the closed understanding, that is to say, the duty to emigrate was now thought to have terminated with the conquest of Mecca. This explains why it would have been important for al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) to

⁸¹ For early traditions stating that the duty to emigrate was abolished on the day of the conquest of Mecca, see ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827) (*Muṣannaf*, 5:309, no. 9713) and Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) (*Muṣannaf*, 13:402, no. 37,928).

⁸² Note that in Ibn Jurayj’s tradition, it is the Prophet who makes a statement about Sa‘d, to whom no direct speech is attributed. According to Crone the didactic question-and-answer form in *hijra* narratives clearly indicates that the transmitters used “history to make doctrinal points.” (“The First-Century Concept of *Hijra*,” 373–4).

establish that the encounter between Sa‘d and the Prophet took place on the very day of the conquest of Mecca.

5.3 *The Prophet’s Prediction about Sa‘d’s Future*

In clause 3a of the Sa‘d will-concern, the Prophet expresses the wish that Allah would raise up Sa‘d so that he might benefit some people and harm others. This prediction provides another clue about chronology. Sa‘d survived his near-death experience and fathered several children who outlived him and presumably inherited whatever wealth he may have left behind. He also went on to play an important role in early Islamic history. He was a member of the *shūrā* or council that chose ‘Uthmān as the third caliph, is said to have maintained a position of neutrality in the struggle between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya, participated in the conquest of Iraq – although, according to some sources, a leg wound prevented him from fighting at al-Qādisiyya⁸³ – and founded the garrison town of Kufa and served as its first governor. He reportedly died between 50 and 58 AH, some 40 to 50 years after his putative near-death experience and verbal exchange with the Prophet about the size of his bequest.⁸⁴

Although the prediction about Sa‘d’s future is too vague to be related to a specific moment in his life, its synoptic character and the underlying theological concern merit attention. Only towards the end of his life would Sa‘d have attained a level of social prominence that would have given him the power to harm or benefit others. The traditionist who formulated the *matn* was careful not to encroach upon the divine prerogative to harm and benefit.⁸⁵ As a result, Sa‘d is portrayed as an instrument for dispensing Allah’s justice in this world. In our view, such a theologically refined prediction would have postdated Sa‘d’s death between 50 and 58 AH.

The prediction motif is not found in the tradition transmitted by Ibn Jurayj (d. 150 AH) but it is found in the tradition subsequently transmitted by ‘Affān b. Muslim (134–220 AH). We suspect that it was ‘Affān – or possibly his informant, Wuhayb b. Khālid (d. 156 AH) – who added the prediction to the short narrative transmitted by Ibn Jurayj, which included a reference to Sa‘d’s illness

⁸³ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, II:520, no. 34,307; cf. loc. cit., no. 34,309. In the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster, Sa‘d’s illness provides the background for the will-concern. Nevertheless, one notes that here, as in the case with Sa‘d’s wound at al-Qādisiyya, Sa‘d’s health is an issue that prevents him from taking part in the battle of Ḥunayn and the siege of al-Tā’if.

⁸⁴ Hawting, “Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ,” *EI*².

⁸⁵ The prerogative to harm or to benefit is usually expressed in the Qur’ān by the verbal antonyms *yanfa‘u/yuḍirru*, employed in a negative way, that is to say, no one and nothing but Allah can benefit or harm (Q 2.102; 6.71; 10.18; 10.106; 21.66; 22.12; 25.55; 26.73).

and the Prophet's instruction that he should be buried facing in the direction of Medina. We also suspect that it was 'Affān – or again Wuhayb – who added Sa'd's question about the location of his burial to the earlier version of the burial motif. He also used the word *muhājir*, thereby transforming the burial motif into the *hijra* concern. That is to say, it was either 'Affān or Wuhayb who produced the compound tradition recorded by the direct collectors Ibn Sa'd and Ibn Ḥanbal, and by the PCL Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭsā al-Qādī.

6 Summary and Conclusion: The History of the 'Amr b. al-Qārī Cluster

Using ICMA, we have identified Ibn Khuthaym as the CL of the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster. This means that the Sa'd-will tradition would have been in circulation in the first half of the second century AH. Using evidence relating to the meaning of the word *kalāla*, the legal doctrine of emigration, and a prediction about Sa'd, we have recovered, in part, the history of this narrative below the level of the CL. The results of our analysis may be summarized as follows:

6.1 *Kalāla*

1. The manuscript evidence of BNF 328 suggests that sometime after the death of the Prophet, but before 75 AH, the word **kalla* in Q 4.12b was changed to *kalāla*, a nonce word that exercised the imagination of the first Muslims.
2. Using ICMA, Pavlovitch has established that the earliest definitions of the word *kalāla* began to circulate in the first half of the second century AH, at which time Kufan traditionists defined *kalāla* as relatives who inherit from a person who has no surviving child or parent (*al-kalāla mā khalā l-walad wa'l-wālid*), while their Hijazi contemporaries defined the word as a deceased person who is inherited by relatives other than a child and a parent (*al-kalāla man lā walad la-hu wa-lā wālid*). Both definitions are found in the 'Amr b. al-Qārī cluster.

6.2 *The CL of the 'Amr b. al-Qārī Cluster*

1. The single-strand *isnād* below Ibn Khuthaym ('Ubayd Allāh b. Ṭyād b. 'Amr b. al-Qārī → his father → his grandfather) is dubious and, in our view, does not represent a real historical transmission.

2. Using ICMA, we have established that ‘Abd Allāh b. Khuthaym is the CL of the ‘Amr b. al-Qārī cluster. As noted, Ibn Khuthaym’s scholarly career began between 90 and 95 AH and he is reported to have died in either 136/753 or 144/761–2. Sometime between 95 and 125 AH, Ibn Khuthaym circulated a tradition in which the Prophet paid a visit to Sa‘d. During the course of a verbal exchange between the two men, Sa‘d indicated that he anticipated dying in the state of leaving neither parent nor child (using the phrase *ūrathu kalālatan*) and asked if he might bequeath all of his wealth (the Prophet said “no”) or one-third of his wealth (the Prophet said “yes”) (see end of section 4.5).
3. We cannot establish with certainty whether or not Ibn Khuthaym’s tradition specified (a) the date of the verbal exchange, (b) its location, or (c) that Sa‘d was ill at the time. Nor can we identify the sources – if any – from whom Ibn Khuthaym may have heard the tradition, or the exact wording of a hypothetical proto-tradition that may have served as the basis for his *matn*.

6.3 *The Burial Motif and the Hijra Concern*

1. During the Umayyad period (41–132/661–750), the duty to emigrate (*hijra*) was understood as an ongoing obligation connected to the duty of *jihād*.
2. In the first quarter of the second century AH, Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767–8) circulated a short tradition in which the Prophet instructed ‘Amr b. al-Qārī that if Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ were to die in Mecca, he should be buried facing in the direction of Medina (“the burial motif”). Ibn Jurayj specified that the Prophet issued this instruction approximately one month *after* the conquest of Mecca, following his return to that city from al-Ta’if. Clearly, Ibn Jurayj was operating on the assumption that the duty to emigrate continued even *after* the conquest of Mecca.
3. By the end of the Umayyad period (132/750), the open-ended understanding of the duty to emigrate had been replaced by the closed understanding of the duty. Subsequently, it was held that the duty to emigrate ceased with the conquest of Mecca in 8/630.
4. The conceptual anachronism in Ibn Jurayj’s tradition points to its antiquity. It is conceivable that Ibn Jurayj drew on a proto-narrative that was put into circulation as early as the last quarter of the first century AH. If so, we are unable to identify Ibn Jurayj’s source or sources.

6.4 *The Prediction Motif*

1. At an undetermined date following Sa‘d’s death ca 58/677–8, someone – we cannot say who – circulated a short tradition in which the Prophet predicted that Allah would raise up Sa‘d so that he might benefit some people and harm others.

6.5 *Affān’s Compound Narrative*

1. In the second half of the second century AH, ‘Affān b. Muslim (134–220 AH) – or possibly Wuhayb b. Khālid (d. 156/772–3) before him – circulated a compound tradition that combined four motifs: (1) Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ’ illness in Mecca; (2) one or more questions posed by Sa‘d to the Prophet about the size of a bequest he might leave after his death (the bequest motif); (3) Sa‘d’s concern about the possibility that he might die in Mecca after having left the city as an emigrant (an expansion of Ibn Jurayj’s burial motif); and (4) the Prophet’s prediction that Allah would raise up Sa‘d so that he would benefit some people and harm others.
2. In all likelihood, ‘Affān’s tradition did not include clauses 2b and 2c, in which Sa‘d asks the Prophet if he might bequeath either two-thirds or one-half of his wealth.
3. ‘Affān’s tradition was transmitted to the direct collectors Ibn Sa‘d and Ibn Ḥanbal, and to the PCL Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. Īsā al-Qādī. Apart from clauses 2b and 2c, the texts recorded by the direct collectors and the PCL were identical.

6.6 *“The Year of the Conquest”*

1. In the first half of the third century AH, al-Bukhārī was troubled by the fact that, in Ibn Jurayj’s tradition, the Prophet’s instruction that Sa‘d should be buried facing in the direction of Medina was issued one month after the conquest of Mecca. The Prophet’s instruction to bury Sa‘d facing in the direction of Medina was inconsistent with al-Bukhārī’s understanding that the obligation to emigrate had been abolished on the day on which Mecca was conquered. The problem was solved by modifying the text so that it specified that the conversation between the Prophet and Sa‘d took place on the very day of the conquest of Mecca. We suspect that it was al-Bukhārī himself who revised the text.

2. By the middle of the third century AH, the text of the Sa‘d-will tradition had been stabilized and 150 years of textual development had come to an end.

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Basra and Kufa as the Earliest Centers of Islamic Legal Controversy

Christopher Melchert

The starting point of this essay is an observation by Patricia Crone:¹

The most important differences (in terms of substantive law) are not those between Sunnīs and non-Sunnīs, but rather those between the Kufan and Basran schools on the one hand and the Medinese and later schools on the other. If one compares the positions of the eight surviving schools on fundamental issues such as whether a person can bequeath more than a third of his estate, whether non-agnatic and non-Qur’ānic relatives (*dhawu'l arḥām*) can inherit, whether there is such a thing as contractual *walā'* and whether *qasāma* is a defensive or accusatory procedure, one finds that the Ḥanafīs, the Ibādīs and the three Shī'ite schools regularly form one bloc, while the Mālikīs, Shāfi'īs and Ḥanbalīs form another. The first five perpetuate the legal tradition of the old Iraqi schools.

The hypothesis tested in the present contribution is whether not Kufa/Basra and Medina but Kufa and Basra were originally the two rival centers of early Islamic legal controversy, with Medinese law a subsequent development based on back projection of Basran positions.

Regional Schools of Law

Joseph Schacht described al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) as arguing against “the ancient schools.” The three great geographical centers as they appear in al-Shāfi'ī's works are Iraq, the Hijaz, and Syria, Iraq subdivided between Kufa and Basra, the Hijaz between Medina and Mecca.² Writing independently at the same time, Robert Brunschwig inferred the predominance of local traditions not only from the polemics of al-Shāfi'ī but letters between al-Layth b. Sa'd and

¹ Crone, *Roman*, 23.

² Schacht, *Origins*, 8.

Mālik b. Anas.³ Schacht conceived of inter-regional competition as a principal motor of Islamic legal development: the jurisprudents of one center would trump the argument of those of another by identifying their own rule with a Follower (*tābi‘ī*), the jurisprudents of the other center would respond by identifying their rule with a Companion, finally rules were projected back onto the Prophet himself.⁴ George Makdisi identified three stages in the formation of the schools of law: a regional stage, when jurisprudents were primarily identified with one or another metropolis; a personal stage, when jurisprudents were primarily identified by their loyalty to one predecessor such as Abū Ḥanīfa or al-Shāfi‘ī; and a guild stage, when the schools served to form and certify qualified jurisprudents.⁵

Wael B. Hallaq has questioned whether we should speak of regional schools, pointing out that our earliest books of law (with the partial exception of Mālik’s *Muwaṭṭa’*) normally cite individual authorities, not anonymous local tradition.⁶ It can easily be shown that Hallaq does not discredit any earlier scholar’s description of regional schools. No one before him said that a regional school, to exist, must be cited anonymously. Neither did anyone before him assert that the regional schools had clear, enforceable boundaries just like the later guild schools. The point of a guild school is that it has enforceable boundaries, unlike the groupings that went before. It is also easy to find references to regional schools in the sources cited by Schacht and Brunschwig. For example, when al-Shāfi‘ī’s anonymous interlocutor (probably al-Shaybānī) refers to the doctrine of the muftis of his time, al-Shāfi‘ī immediately asks him about those of the various centers (*buldān*). He starts with Kufa, where he points out that Ibn Abī Laylā disagrees, then moves to Basra. A little further on, the interlocutor refers to “your *ashāb* the Meccans.”⁷ This is not a picture of myriad personal schools that will be shaken down to the four or five guild schools in time, nor the way disagreements are listed in the guild period. The legal sources on which Schacht and Brunschwig relied are confirmed by Ibn al-Muqaffa‘

³ Brunschwig, “Polémiques,” esp. 379–87. The earliest appearance of these letters, to my knowledge, is in Fasawī, *Ma‘rifa*, 1:687–97.

⁴ Schacht, *Origins*, esp. part 2, chapter 3, “The conflict of doctrines as reflected in the growth of traditions,” 152–63.

⁵ Makdisi, “*Tabaqāt*-Biography,” 389–92.

⁶ Hallaq, “From Regional to Personal,” *passim*.

⁷ Shāfi‘ī, “*Ikhtilāf al-hadīth*,” *Umm*, 7:336–8/10:277–8 (the numbers referring to two different editions). Al-Shāfi‘ī is still classified among the jurisprudents of Mecca by al-Nasā‘ī, “*Tasmiya*,” *Majmū‘at rasā‘il*, 8/32; Bukhārī, *Du‘afā’*, 124. The special solicitude of al-Shāfi‘ī for the tradition of Mecca is remarked by Brunschwig, “Polémiques,” 379. It has recently been documented by Yahia, Šāfi‘ī, 94–106.

(d. 142/759–60?), who describes disagreement between and within regions. The main cleavage he points out is between the people of Iraq and the people of the Hijaz, although he also mentions disagreement within cities.⁸ Besides the correspondence of Mālik and al-Layth b. Sa'd cited by Brunschwig, we have a letter supposedly written by Mālik to the caliph, explaining why it would not be feasible for him to produce a book to be imposed on all the regions, since they were already used to their different ways.⁹ (The foregoing paragraph is not offered as a thorough refutation of Hallaq's article, rather a suggestion of why I think it is safe to proceed with a study of regional schools.)

As for defining and documenting regional doctrine, Josef van Ess analyzed *isnād* trees, along with other evidence, to see where particular theological doctrines were current.¹⁰ Michael Cook located longest lasting opposition to the writing of hadith in Basra.¹¹ Their method is to look up where the men in an *isnād* were active. Our biographical directories of traditionists, if not arranged regionally to start with, pay considerable attention to geography; hence, Ibn Ḥajar, synthesizing many early biographical collections, provides some indication of date, even so general as the caliphal reign in which someone died, for only about 40 percent of all the men in the Six Books, but an indication of place for 70 percent.¹²

This present essay is especially concerned with the relation of the different schools to one another. Joseph Schacht spoke of Islamic jurisprudence (that is, "the first theorizing and systematizing activities which were to transform Umayyad popular and administrative practice into Muhammadan law") as originating in a single center, mainly Iraq.¹³ Writing at about the same time, Robert Brunschwig described it as being born, in its classical sense, in Kufa.¹⁴ Schacht found that Medinese positions continually looked like responses to Kufan.¹⁵

⁸ Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Risāla*, 353. Schacht remarks on this epistle briefly (*Origins*, 95).

⁹ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqāt al-kubrā: al-qism*, 440–1. Additional and variant quotations reviewed by Dutton, *Origins*, 192, n. 86.

¹⁰ Josef van Ess, *Zwischen*; e.g., p. 99, finding that one predestinarian hadith report had transmitters concentrated in Kufa and Medina. Van Ess may be credited with inventing what Motzki calls the "*isnād-cum-matr*" technique of identifying particular variants with particular transmitters, although without giving it a name.

¹¹ Cook, "Opponents," esp. 446–9, 455–8, 464–6, 474–5.

¹² More on the problem of where traditionists were active in Melchert, "Life."

¹³ Schacht, *Origins*, 222–3.

¹⁴ Brunschwig, "Polémiques," 378.

¹⁵ Schacht, *Origins*, 188–9, 220, 223.

A complication is borrowing between one center and another. “A favourite device in the creation of counter-traditions,” according to Schacht, “consists of borrowing the name of the main authority for, or transmitter of, the opposite doctrine.”¹⁶ This accounts for the many instances in which someone is cited on both sides of a question. An example is whether ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr pronounced the *basmala* aloud (on which question, more below). Najam Haider cites a quotation in which he did, directly opposed by another in which he and his brother ‘Urwa did not.¹⁷ The hadith report in which he did pronounce it aloud has a solidly Basran chain of transmitters up to Ibn Abī Shayba, whereas the report in which he did not has a Kufan on its lower (more recent) end, but then moves to Medinese from the mid-eighth century upwards. After Schacht, then, I would infer that the former hadith report represents Basran doctrine projected onto a prominent Companion, whereas the latter represents Kufan doctrine projected onto at least one of their Basran opponents’ authorities. The difficulty is to be met, then, by being wary of reports supported by mixed *isnāds* that veer from one region to another.

Another complication is evident disagreement within cities, as observed by Ibn al-Muqaffā‘. Schacht thought that where Ibn Mas‘ūd was commonly adduced in support of the majority Kufan position, ‘Alī would often be adduced in support of a minority position; yet it also happened that ‘Alī would endorse the majority position, Ibn Mas‘ūd that of the opposition. He mentions Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. Basra, 161/777?) as an example of someone identifiably Kufan in his doctrine, yet often opposed to what became the Ḥanafi position.¹⁸ Al-Shāfi‘ī’s *Kitāb al-Umm* includes two shorter works just on disagreement within Kufa: *Ikhtilāf Abī Ḥanīfa wa-‘bn Abī Laylā* and *Ikhtilāf ‘Alī wa-‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd*; another work on his own disagreements with Mālik (*Ikhtilāf Mālik wa-l-Shāfi‘ī*), in which he frequently accuses Mālik of falsely claiming a Medinese consensus behind his own position when in fact there is Medinese disagreement.

Juynboll has proposed another particular method:¹⁹

Mālik → Nāfi‘ → Ibn ‘Umar → Prophet strands were simply attached by Mālik and later traditionists, such as many of the great collectors like Ibn

¹⁶ Ibid., 155.

¹⁷ Haider, “Basmalah,” 497, *isnād* no. 116. This is to be found in Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, *k. al-ṣalāt*, 237, *man kāna yajharu bihā*, ed. J&L, 2:371, no. 4175. The opposing hadith report is at Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, *k. al-ṣalāt*, 236, *man lā yajharu bi-bi’sm Allāh*, ed. J&L, 2:369, no. 4157.

¹⁸ Schacht, *Origins*, 240–2.

¹⁹ Juynboll, “Some Notes,” 311.

Ḥanbal, Buḥārī, and Muslim, to legal material that originated outside Medina and without which Medina's legal system looked incomplete, as if it lagged behind the systems developed elsewhere. In other words, the Medinan jurists thus incorporated that foreign legal material into their already existing system, supporting it with their own renowned strand to make it truly "Medinan".

This sort of back projection will be much harder to detect than citing the opponents' authorities. It will be a reason Juynboll systematically distrusted "single strands," *akhbār al-āḥād* in the technical language of medieval jurisprudents. It is one more warning not to presume that Prophet (and Companion) reports supported by unmixed, single-region *isnāds* actually do go back to the earlier seventh century.

The hypothesis that not Kufa/Basra and Medina but Kufa and Basra were originally the two rival centers of early Islamic legal debate, with Medinese law a subsequent development based on back projection of Basran positions, first suggested itself to me when I studied the problem of whether women should be allowed to go to the mosque and to lead prayers. At the level of the Followers, I found opposition to women's activity concentrated in Kufa, its defense in Basra, and then Medinese defense of it citing Companions.²⁰ The next year, I proposed some further examples in an unpublished convention paper.²¹ I put the case most strongly in a study of the judicial oath in Islamic law, although conceding that this particular problem offered only weak evidence for it.²² A study of eighth-century polemics over public baths found doubts about them concentrated in Basra and their defense in Kufa, although with dissenting minorities in both centers. Again, Medinese reports expressed doubts, in line with the prevailing Basran opinion, but going back to Companions and the Prophet.²³ On Schacht's thesis of progressive back-projection, Medinese citations of Companions and the Prophet would presumptively represent improvements on earlier Basran arguments.

Regional Positions in Three Earlier Studies

Yasin Dutton and I have both written about the salutation at the end of the ritual prayer. Dutton first goes over in detail the hadith cited in the *Muwatṭa'* of

²⁰ Melchert, "Whether," esp. 60–1.

²¹ Melchert, "*Muṣannaf*."

²² Melchert, "History," esp. 324–5.

²³ Melchert, "Public."

Mālik, the *Mudawwana* of Saḥnūn, *al-Ḥujja ‘alā ahl al-Madīna* of al-Shaybānī, *al-Umm* of al-Shāfi‘ī, and the *Muṣannafs* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba. Dutton thinks his evidence is incompatible with the theories of Goldziher and Schacht. First, earlier sources (above all, ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba, not published when Schacht was writing) cite the Prophet, Companions, and Followers, whereas later sources concentrate exclusively on the Prophet. Secondly, “the majority of the *aḥādīth* included by the later collectors have antecedents in the earlier material, both in terms of *isnād* and actual contents: that is, they do not represent something new, and thus by implication fabricated, but rather are recycling or reorganizations of older material.”²⁴ I think nothing of the sort: that Islamic law before al-Shāfi‘ī was not founded mainly on the remembered example of the Prophet is exactly Goldziher’s and Schacht’s main thesis, while Dutton’s later collections illustrate very well the improvement, backward growth, and spread of *isnāds* of which Schacht complains.²⁵ For example, as Dutton observes, Ibn Māja (or Mājah) quotes a prophetic hadith report through ‘Ammār b. Yāsir in favor of two salutations, whereas al-Shaybānī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, and Ibn Abī Shayba report rather ‘Ammār b. Yāsir’s own practice of saluting twice.²⁶ What is new is the attribution to the Prophet himself, which it seems to me has a high probability of being fabricated, convenient as it is to the orthodoxy of Ibn Māja’s own time.

I will make two methodological points. First, Dutton states that the Hanafi, Shāfi‘ī, and Ḥanbali schools all call for saluting twice, whereas the Mālikī school calls for only a single salutation in some circumstances.²⁷ Actually, this is somewhat of a simplification. As Dutton himself points out, al-Shāfi‘ī appears to hold only the first salutation necessary, the second being merely recommended.²⁸ Disagreement is reported within both the Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanbali schools as to whether a second salutation is strictly required, while four different opinions are ascribed within the school to Mālik.²⁹ (The Hanafi school holds them both recommended, not required.) I think the point is worth raising to show that disagreement within a school is fairly normal, in the guild period as in the regional. Some critics have suggested that it is futile to identify regional schools unless one can point to evident unanimity, a criterion that

²⁴ Dutton, “Innovation,” 170–1.

²⁵ The three terms appear together at Schacht, *Origins*, 166.

²⁶ Dutton, “Innovation,” 171.

²⁷ Dutton, “Innovation,” 148.

²⁸ Shāfi‘ī, *Umm*, 1:106/2:279; Dutton, “Innovation,” 167fn.

²⁹ Melchert, “Concluding,” 398–9 (Shāfi‘ī opinions); Mardāwī, *Inṣāf*, 2:64 (Ḥanbali); Melchert, “Concluding,” 399–400 (Mālikī).

would equally disallow us to speak of a Shāfi‘ī or Ḥanbali school.³⁰ Secondly, Dutton does not look at the *Musnad* of Ahmad b. Ḥanbal. My own search of the *Musnad* came up with 25 hadith reports treating the number of salutations. They are all prophetic, unsurprisingly, and they all describe two salutations. Fifteen of them are Kufan, none is Basran all the way back to a Companion, most of the rest are Medinese or mainly so. Would it have made any difference to his analysis? Probably not: the hadith here falls into principal groups of hadith identified by Dutton from elsewhere. As for geography, it does imply that Kufans were extraordinarily busy with citing prophetic precedent for what was presumably the Kufan position.

Dutton lists Companion and Follower positions as reported by his early sources. Companion positions run eight-to-six in favor of one salutation; five-to-three if we eliminate contradictory reports. Follower positions run fourteen-to-twelve in favor of one salutation; eleven-to-nine if we eliminate contradictory reports. This is important to his case for one salutation as the dominant practice before pressure developed to follow Prophet hadith. If we classify the Followers geographically, the 14 Followers quoted in favor of one salutation turn out to include six Kufans, four Basrans, three Medinese, and one Meccan; if we eliminate persons quoted on both sides, five Kufans, three Basrans, and three Medinese. The twelve Followers quoted in favor of two salutations turn out to include nine Kufans and one each of Basrans, Meccans, and Medinese; if we eliminate persons quoted on both sides, eight Kufans and one Medinese. It looks as if, in the early eighth century, Kufa and Medina were divided but leaning toward one, the position in favor of which Basra was united. This seems to strengthen Dutton's case slightly, at least for one salutation as the originally predominant position. It also makes it unsurprising that al-Shāfi‘ī should have been able to find so much Medinese Prophet hadith in favor of two, it having long been at least a minority position in Medina. What about citations of the rival center's authorities: will Dutton's figures be further affected if we eliminate mixed *isnāds*? By some: among Follower reports in favor of one salutation, we are left with three Kufan, two Basran, and three Medinese; in favor of two salutations, six Kufan and one Medinese. Basra still appears to be solidly in favor of one salutation, Kufa and Medina divided, but now the majority position in Kufa seems to be two salutations. This makes it less surprising that two salutations should have prevailed there (and in the Hanafi school to come) in the long term.

³⁰ E.g., Hurvitz, "Schools," esp. 44–5; Katz, *Body*, index, s.v. "regional schools"; also Hallaq, "From Regional to Personal," e.g., where the occurrence of disagreement within Medina is offered as evidence that no Medinese school existed (6).

Another particular problem has been analyzed by Najam Haider: whether to begin recitation of Q 1 (*al-Fatiha*) in the ritual prayer with the words *bi-'sm Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* (the *basmala*) or rather *al-ḥamd lillāh rabb al-‘ālamīn*. Haider examines the legal literature and finds that the Shāfi‘i school advocates beginning with the *basmala* aloud, the Mālikī school with *al-ḥamd lillāh*, the Ḥanafī school with the *basmala* to oneself, then *al-ḥamd lillāh* aloud, the Ḥanbali school with the *basmala* aloud but with reservations as to whether it is actually a part of the Qur'an. (Within the school, Ahmad is quoted as saying it is not said aloud, is said aloud, is said aloud in Medina alone, is said aloud in supererogatory prayers only.)³¹ Regional specialization appears if one inspects the hadith cited in support of each of these positions.³² As one might expect, al-Shāfi‘ī quotes a series of hadith reports in favour of beginning with the *basmala* aloud through Meccan informants going back to Companions, with three exceptions.³³ One of these exceptions goes back to Ibn ‘Abbās without any chain of transmitters (*isnād*). One goes through the Kufan Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/714?); but he fled with his father to Mecca at some point and is said to have derived his text of the Qur'an from Ibn ‘Abbās, whom he here quotes in favor of counting the *basmala* an integral part of Q 1.³⁴ The last exception is a hadith report that al-Shāfi‘ī knows about through Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna (d. 198/814), a Kufan who transferred to Mecca, going back through Basran transmitters to the report of Anas b. Mālik that the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and ‘Umar all started with *al-ḥamd lillāh*.

Al-Shāfi‘ī interprets away this contrary hadith report as describing what the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and ‘Umar did *after* pronouncing the *basmala*. ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba recount various hadith reports through Basran transmitters from Anas in favor of starting with *al-ḥamd lillāh*, sometimes omitting the Prophet.³⁵ Mālik quotes one of them to support his position of starting with *al-ḥamd lillāh*. ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba also quote the Companion ‘Ā’isha, with a Basran *isnād*, testifying to the Prophet's beginning with *al-ḥamd lillāh*. Two hadith reports testify to Ibn Mas‘ūd and Anas' own omission of the *basmala*. Near the end of the section, we also have two reports of Follower practice: al-Ḥasan (d. 110/728) and Abū Wā'il (d. ca 100/718–19) both opened their recitation with *al-ḥamd lillāh rabb al-‘ālamīn*. Al-Ḥasan was

³¹ Mardāwī, *Inṣāf*, 2:37.

³² Haider, “To Basmalah”; Haider, *Origins*, 57–94.

³³ Shāfi‘ī, *Umm*, 1:93–4/2:244–7.

³⁴ See Jeffery, *Materials*, 245.

³⁵ ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 2:88–93; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, k. *al-ṣalāt*, 236, *man kāna lā yajharu bi-“bi-‘smi Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm”*, ed. J&L, 2:367–71.

Basran, of course, and the solidly Basran *isnād* of this report is unsurprising. Abū Wā'il, on the other hand, was Kufan; however, the *isnād* attached to this report of his prayer is likewise solidly Basran, so it presumably represents the Basrans' citing one of their opponents' authorities.

'Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba also report hadith in favor not of omitting the *baslāma* but of pronouncing it only to oneself. Each has only one that goes all the way back to the Prophet. Anas, in this version, says, "I prayed behind the Prophet, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān. They did not say aloud *bi-'sm Allāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm*."³⁶ They have more hadith from Companions and Followers. Besides examples, there is one definite rule from a Follower, Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'i: "The imam says silently *bi-'sm Allāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm*, the *isti'ādha*, *āmīn*, and *rabbanā laka al-ḥamad*."³⁷ This has a solidly Kufan *isnād* down to Ibn Abī Shayba, like some others reporting Companion examples. Other reports in favor of this position are supported by mixed Kufan/Basran and Kufan/Medinese *isnāds*.

The evident pattern is for all-Meccan *isnāds* to support the position that one first recites *bi-'sm Allāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm* aloud, all-Basran *isnāds* to support the position that one begins with *al-ḥamad lillāh*, and all-Kufan *isnāds* to support the position that one first recites *bi-'sm Allāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm* to oneself. If we take these to be the positions of the respective regional schools – Meccan, Basran, and Kufan – contradictory reports and mixed *isnāds* are obviously explained by Joseph Schacht's model of inter-regional polemics. The Meccan position later became that of the Shāfi'i school, the Basran position of the Mālikī, and the Kufan position of the Ḥanafī. The only unusual feature of hadith concerning this topic is that Mālik expressly takes his evidence from a series of Basrans, not earlier Medinese, whereas Mālik normally supports his position by citing hadith from the Prophet and Companions with purely Medinese chains of transmission.³⁸ Of significance here is that regional positions have been convincingly identified; also that, whereas Basran and Kufan Followers are quoted as espousing positions of their own, their Meccan and Medinese contemporaries are quoted only as relating what Companions and the Prophet said before them. The tradition (especially Mālikī) tells us this is because Hijazis were more faithful to precedent than Iraqis. On Schacht's hypothesis, on the other hand, one infers that the record of Hijazi jurisprudence has a higher proportion of back projection.

³⁶ 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 2:88; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 2:370.

³⁷ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 2:369.

³⁸ See Haider, *Origins*, 61–6, for a review of Mālikī rationalizations.

A significant methodological question raised by Haider is how to identify an *isnād* that belongs entirely to one center. In his book, he apparently looks at transmitters in the whole second/eighth century. Elsewhere, however, Haider considers links from between 100 and 150 AH (roughly, 718–67 CE).³⁹ This narrower range avoids the problem of traditionists who seem to relate hadith as completists, not advocates of a regional tradition: for example, the Wasiti Hushaym b. Bashīr (d. 183/799), al-Shāfi‘ī, as he deliberately reviews the hadith his opponents cite, and ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba, who continually present hadith in favor of some position, then hadith in favor of the opposite. It has the disadvantage of not discriminating between Follower and Companion reports. At least on Schacht’s model, there is some presumption that the former are earlier.

Behnam Sadeghi has stressed precisely the difference between mixed and single-region *isnāds* in “The Traveling Tradition Test: A Method for Dating Traditions.” Sadeghi is largely concerned with Prophet hadith and offers arguments both for discrediting some on the ground of mixed *isnāds* and confirming others as genuinely going back at least to the first century AH. One of Sadeghi’s examples is the problem, which he calls archaic, of whether someone’s ritual prayer is invalidated by the passage in front of him of a dog, an ass, or a woman. Sadeghi collects ten hadith reports that name all three, six of them with purely Basran *isnāds*; for example, Ibn Abī Shayba < Mu‘tamir b. Sulaymān (Basran, d. 187/802–3) < Salm (b. Abī al-Dhayyāl, Basran, fl. 2nd/8th cent.) < al-Ḥasan (Basran): “Dogs, women, and asses cut off the ritual prayer.”⁴⁰ Variant doctrines, such as naming dogs alone or specifying menstruating women or black dogs, are consistently associated at some level with other cities – especially, it seems, Mecca. Reports naming all three without qualification thus seem to enounce a distinctly Basran doctrine. It was not so regarded in the guild period. For example, the Egyptian Ḥanafi Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī (d. 855/1451) states that, although the rule is now rejected by most jurisprudents, those who said dogs, asses, and women invalidate a ritual prayer were Anas, Makhūl, Abū ’l-Aḥwāṣ, al-Ḥasan, and ʻIkrima; that is, besides one Companion, Followers of Damascus, Kufa, Basra, and Medina. The example seems, then, to cast doubt on the wisdom of inferring prevalent doctrines from late lists of Followers who espoused

³⁹ Ibid., 80; private communication.

⁴⁰ Sadeghi, “Traveling,” 214; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 2:144. Sadeghi cites Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, ed. Lahḥām, 1:315, substituting “Salm,” the name of a known transmitter from al-Ḥasan, for printed “Sālim.” Jum‘a and Luḥaydān make the same correction, apparently with support from one of their manuscripts. The Lahḥām edition is merely a retyping of the 1960s Hyderabad edition with added mistakes and should no longer be cited.

them. Ibn Abī Shayba indeed quotes Makhūl al-Shāmī, for example, in favor of this doctrine but by a completely Basran *isnād* below him.⁴¹

Sadeghi's study is outstandingly thorough, based on a wider range of sources than either Dutton's or Haider's, as in drawing on Ahmad's *Musnad*. It helps him, among other things, to discredit a quotation of 'A'isha with a Syrian *isnād*: "The Messenger of God said that nothing breaks the prayer of a Muslim but donkeys, unbelievers, dogs, and women. 'A'isha said, '[O] Messenger of God! We are joined with beasts. How awful!' " As Sadeghi says, the wording appears to have been fashioned precisely to answer the many reports by which 'A'isha rejects the rule. He might have cited, among others, Abū Dāwūd < Musaddad (b. Musarhad, Basran, d. 228/843) < Yahyā (b. Sa'īd al-Qatṭān, Basran, d. 198/813?) < 'Ubayd Allāh (b. 'Umar, Medinese, d. 147/764–5?) < al-Qāsim (b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, Medinese, d. 101/719–20?) < 'A'isha: "How bad of you to join us (as equals) to asses and dogs. I saw the Messenger of God pray when I was right before him. When he wished to prostrate himself, he touched my leg so I gathered it up and then he prostrated himself."⁴² However, the source he actually cites is 'Abd al-Razzāq, quoting her without mention of the Prophet: "O people of Iraq, you have joined me (as an equal) to a dog or an ass. Nothing cuts off the ritual prayer, but be as careful as you can."⁴³ Knowing the collections of Abū Dāwūd and others enables him to say that her rejection was widely reported. However, as with Yasin Dutton, it seems he did not urgently need to go beyond our best sources for eighth-century debates, 'Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba, at least to determine the Basran character of the rule about a dog, an ass, or a woman. What then of the thesis that Basra and Kufa were the earliest centers of legal controversy? Here, Ibn Abī Shayba is not much help, not documenting Kufan opposition for us.⁴⁴ Neither is there evidence that the Basran rule enjoyed any significant later support in Medina.

Twenty-two Other Controversies

My present contribution to the discussion is a review of 22 other legal controversies for which Ibn Abī Shayba reviews in succession evidence for and

⁴¹ Sadeghi, "Traveling," 214, no. 7; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 2:144.

⁴² Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, k. *al-ṣalāt*, 111, *bāb man qāla al-mar'a lā taqta'u 'l-ṣalāt*, no. 712.

⁴³ Sadeghi, "Traveling," 207fn., 217; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 2:30.

⁴⁴ Juynboll identifies the Basran Qatāda as the originator of a Prophet hadith report naming dogs, asses, and women: *Encyclopedia*, 443. He assigns counter-hadith reports to the Kufan al-A'mash, the Medinese Mālik, and the Basran Shu'ba: *Encyclopedia*, 123, 315, 561.

against a proposed rule. My hypothesis that Kufa and Basra were the original centers of juridical controversy will be confirmed if it turns out that a majority of Followers in each of these two are regularly cited in support of opposing rules, with Medinese Companion hadith supporting the Basran position. The traditional characterization of Iraq and Medina as the original centers of juridical controversy will be confirmed if it turns out that a majority of Followers in both Kufa and Basra are regularly cited in support of one rule, opposed by a majority of Medinese Followers in support of an opposing one. If no particular pattern emerges, that will tend to support the null hypothesis that there were no regional schools, just individuals agreeing or disagreeing with others more or less at random. My summaries stress *isnāds* from one center, at least to near the end of the eighth century, ignoring most mixed *isnāds*.

Kufa Against Basra

Whether the minor ritual ablution is required for qals (vomit that reaches the mouth but does not leave the body) (1:75–6). Kufan Follower hadith in favor; Basran against. The same from ‘Abd al-Razzāq, also two Meccan Follower reports in favor.⁴⁵

Whether, in the ritual prayer, the hands should be raised to the shoulders or the ears (2:59–62). A Basran Follower report favors the shoulders, while the ears are favored by two Kufan Follower and two Prophet reports.

One Center Divided

How often to wipe the head (1:29–31). Follower hadith for once, all Kufan; for twice, mixed but mainly Basran or Medinese; for three times, solely and archaically Kufan.

Whether to perform multiple ritual prayers on one ablution (1:52–5). Kufan and Basran Follower hadith in favor; Basran only for a new ablution for each prayer.

Ritual ablution with a woman's leftover water (1:62–4). Kufan and Basran hadith in favor, Basran only against. ‘Abd al-Razzāq quotes a Meccan Follower and two Medinese Companion reports in favor, a Basran Follower and a Basran Companion hadith report against.⁴⁶

Whether kissing calls for renewed ablutions (1:83–5). Kufan hadith on both sides, Basran in favor. ‘Abd al-Razzāq quotes Basran Follower reports on both sides, no Kufan opposed.⁴⁷ More Kufan appeals to Hijazis, Companions, and

45 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 1:136–8.

46 Ibid., 1:105–8.

47 Ibid., 1:132–6.

the Prophet on the side of no ritual ablution for kissing, so this is probably the newer position. Mālik cites two Companions and one Follower in favor, all with purely Medinese *isnāds*.⁴⁸ It is possible that these are what Kufan appeals to Hijazis, Companions, and the Prophet were opposing.

Whether eating food touched by fire calls for renewed ablutions (1:88–97). Basran Companion and Follower hadith on both sides, but only Basran hadith in favor, as opposed to multiple Kufan reports against, also a Medinese Prophet report and a Meccan Companion.

Whether the adhān and iqāma are required for women (2:40–2). Actually, no one is quoted as saying it is either required or forbidden. One Kufan Follower report and two Basran deny that it is obligatory, while one Kufan Companion report is a little more encouraging of it.

Whether to raise the hands only at the opening of the ritual prayer or at multiple points throughout (2:62–6). Two Kufan Prophet and seven Follower reports for raising the hands only once. Two Kufan Prophet, two Basran Companion, three Follower reports for raising hands repeatedly. ‘Abd al-Razzāq offers three Kufan Companion and one Follower report for raising the hands only once, confirming that this was the majority position in Kufa; three Meccan Follower reports for raising hands repeatedly.⁴⁹

Whether to close the ritual prayer with one salutation or two (2:173–82). Strongly Kufan in favor of saluting twice, with no unmixed Basran *isnāds* on this side. More mixed in favor of once: two Kufan Follower reports, but more usually some Basran links, including two Basran Follower reports, two Basran Companion, and one Basran Prophet.

Whether it is comely to develop a callus from frequent prostration (2:190–2). Kufan hadith on both sides, one Basran Companion report against.

Both Centers Divided

Whether to run the fingers through the beard in the course of the minor ritual ablution (1:24–8). Purely Kufan and Basran *isnāds* on both sides, but somewhat more Kufan support and Basran opposition.

Whether to wipe the turban (1:42–5). Kufan Follower hadith on both sides, Basran and Medinese for removing the turban, but Basran Companion and Prophet hadith on both sides. Presumably, preference for removing the

48 Mālik, *Muwatta'*, rec. Yahyā, *al-ṣalāt*, 24, *al-wuḍū' min qublat al-rajul imra'atah*, nos. 106–8; rec. Muṣab, *al-ṣalāt*, 16, *al-wuḍū' min al-qubla*, nos. 117–19. Al-Shāfi'i quotes the first Companion report from Mālik: *Umm*, 1:12/1:37.

49 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 2:67–74.

turban, not just wiping it, grew across the eighth century. ‘Abd al-Razzāq offers no reports with Basran *isnāds*, but quotes Meccan Followers on both sides.⁵⁰

Whether pissing requires washing the penis (1:100–2). Basran reports on both sides, likewise Kufan Companion reports, but three Kufan Follower reports in favor, suggesting an earlier majority in favor.

Whether the muezzin may speak in the course of his call to prayer (2:21–2). Basran and Kufan hadith on both sides, but more Basran Follower hadith for allowing speech, more Kufan against.

Whether a man may prostrate himself without removing his hands from his garment (2:115–18). Basran and Kufan Companion hadith on both sides, but Kufan Follower reports allow keeping the hands inside, Basran and Medinese Follower reports require withdrawing them.

Whether a man may prostrate himself without removing his turban (so that his forehead does not directly touch the ground) (2:118–21). Basran and Kufan Companion and Follower reports on both sides.

Other Combinations

For performing the minor ritual ablution in threes or a smaller number (1:16–22). No Follower hadith. Appears to be an internal Kufan controversy.

Whether eating camel flesh calls for renewed ablutions (1:87–8). Largely Kufan on both sides, but Follower and Companion examples oppose requiring the minor ritual ablution, whereas there are Prophetic as well in favor of it, also more Basran involvement, so presumably the more lenient position is the older Kufan one.

Whether the muezzin must be in a state of ritual purity (2:19–20). Mixed *isnāds* from Medina and Mecca in favor, Kufan and Basran hadiths against. But whereas ‘Abd al-Razzāq quotes the same report of one Kufan Follower, Ibrāhīm, he has Meccan and Basran Follower reports in favor of requiring ritual purity.⁵¹

Whether the prostration requires touching the nose to the ground as well as the forehead (2:109–11). Kufan Follower hadith on both sides. ‘Abd al-Razzāq reports Kufan Follower hadith in favor, also Meccan and a Medinese Companion report.⁵²

Whether one may prostrate oneself on a pillow or other support (2:127–8). Three Basran Companion reports in favor, one Basran Follower report against.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1:87–90.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1:465–6.

⁵² Ibid., 2:179–83.

Twenty-two is a small sample size, chosen for no better reason than how much time I found in the summer of 2012 to look up names in *isnāds*. In addition, the controversies summarized here all have to do with the ritual law, not interpersonal relations (*mu'āmalāt*), again for no better reason than convenience, unless ritual is an area where public opinion must have been peculiarly effective in producing regional uniformity. (In the guild period, different neighborhoods would observe their peculiar ritual forms, as the tenth-century traveler al-Maqdīsī observes; but even then, there might be odd combinations of doctrines from different schools.)⁵³ Still, I predict that further research will tend to confirm the patterns evident here. First, Basra and Kufa are by far the best-represented centers when it comes to hadiths with unmixed *isnāds*. They were clearly early centers of jurisprudence. Ibn Abī Shayba, at least, gives no impression that the principal antagonists were the jurisprudents of Kufa and Medina respectively. To be sure, he was Kufan himself and took very few hadith reports from Meccan or Medinese shaykhs (about 3 percent of all items in the *Muṣannaf*, almost all the rest coming from shaykhs of Kufa – two-thirds of the total – Basra, Wasit, or Baghdad). Still, it appears that, thanks to Ibn Abī Shayba, Basran doctrine can be reconstructed in much more detail than Schacht thought possible.⁵⁴ ‘Abd al-Razzāq offers supplementary reports of Follower opinion in Mecca and Medina as well as, less often, Kufa and Basra. Seldom does he alter the picture of regional doctrines from Ibn Abī Shayba – only once, really, in this sample of 22 controversies, where he would shift the question of whether the muezzin may be in a state of ritual impurity from the category of Kufan–Basran agreement to the category of unity in one center (Kufa) but division in the other (Basra).

Secondly, the largest category comprises apparent unity in one center, division in the other. The next largest category comprises disagreement in both centers. On only one question of the 22, whether the muezzin needs to be ritually pure, does there seem to be a split between Iraqis on one side, Hijazis on the other – what ought to be the usual case if Iraq and Medina had been the chief rival centers. Usually, it is possible to infer which position enjoyed majority support in each center, as with whether to run the fingers through the

⁵³ E.g., Maqdīsī, *Descriptio*, 180 (the appearance of Shāfi'i predominance in Syria belied by their preferring not to pronounce the *basmala* aloud or to add the *qunūt* outside the second half of Ramadān); 323 (one of the mosques of Marw is Shāfi'i except that they pronounce the *iqāma* there in twos).

⁵⁴ “Although occasional references to the Basrians are not lacking, little is known about their doctrine in detail, and our knowledge of the ancient Iraqians is mainly confined to the Kufians”: Schacht, *Origins*, 8.

beard; but the case is admittedly never strong. A minority position in the time of the Followers may have become the majority position later on, likely to be supported by Companion and Prophet hadith as they became winning arguments. Comparison between the doctrines of regional and guild schools will provide abundant examples.

Thirdly, citing authorities from a rival center seems to have been very common in the course of eighth-century controversy. I have examined almost 400 hadith reports from Ibn Abī Shayba concerning these 22 other controversies. They are evenly divided between mixed and single-region *isnāds*. I have, of course, systematically downplayed mixed-*isnād* reports in identifying regional positions. The great ninth-century collectors of Prophet hadiths seem also to have downplayed mixed-*isnād* reports. Working mainly from biographical dictionaries, although also indirectly from Ahmād's *Musnad*, Scott C. Lucas has identified the generation of traditionists who died 120–50 (738–67) as specialists in the hadiths of "a particular body of *ḥadīth* from a *Šahābī* or *Tābi'ī*," with easily identifiable circles of disciples.⁵⁵ Here are some figures I have assembled from a randomly chosen sample of 246 hadith reports in the *Šaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī, showing transmission roughly from the earlier eighth century (Follower level) to the middle or later:

Basra → Basra 46

Basra → Kufa 4

Basra → elsewhere 4

Kufa → Basra 13

Kufa → Kufa 47

Kufa → elsewhere 1

Mecca → Basra 4

Mecca → Mecca 4

Mecca → elsewhere 2

Medina → Basra 13

Medina → Egypt 9

Medina → Kufa 17

Medina → Medina 61

Medina → Syria 7

Medina → elsewhere 5

⁵⁵ Lucas, *Constructive*, 341.

Clearly, al-Bukhārī thought highly of hadith that (apparently) circulated in Medina in the first half of the second century AH. He also seems to have eschewed hadith with mixed *isnāds* far more than Ibn Abī Shayba. Behnam Sadeghi has pointed out to me that one strong reason for Ibn Abī Shayba to have more mixed *isnāds* is that, having collected so little from Hijazi shaykhs, most traditions originating in the Hijaz could reach him only through mixed *isnāds*. But Bukhārī also took more material from Kufan shaykhs than Medinese, and presumably heard much Kufan/Medinese hadith in Kufa, so this category still seems underrepresented in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. (By my calculations, Bukhārī collected about 11 percent of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* from Kufan shaykhs, 6 percent from Medinese. The comparison would admittedly be easier if we could look at his *Kitāb al-Sunan fi 'l-fiqh*, which presumably comprised quantities of Companion and Follower opinions.)⁵⁶

At the level of the Followers, I fear it is Medinese doctrine that will be the hardest to reconstruct in detail. Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaf* provides by far our best documentation of eighth-century legal controversy, comprising almost twice as many items as 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* and over a dozen times as many as Mālik's *Muwaṭṭa'*.⁵⁷ However, Ibn Abī Shayba is evidently best for controversy in Kufa and Basra. For only a few of the 22 questions reviewed here does the *Muwaṭṭa'* offer anything. Moreover, Mālik's *Muwaṭṭa'* usually takes an openly polemical approach, seldom documenting disagreement with its own position. This limits its usefulness for making out the history of Medinese jurisprudence. One example has been noted already, as to whether kissing calls for renewed ablutions. Mālik offers Medinese reports in favor of what seems in the *Muṣannaf* to be the Basran position. Another is whether one may merely wipe the turban without removing it. Some Basrans seem to have taken a permissive stance, citing Companions and the Prophet in their favor, but Basran Followers are quoted against this position. Mālik also is against it, but offers only his unsupported opinion, telling us nothing of earlier Medinese controversy.⁵⁸ It is usually very hard to tell whether lack of information on Medinese positions in the generation before Mālik means that they were not discussing a particular position, they were discussing it but Mālik prefers weightier appeals to Companions and the Prophet, or they were discussing it but advocated different rules from what Mālik believes in.

⁵⁶ Listed among his works by Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, fann 6, *maqāla* 6.

⁵⁷ For more on Ibn Abī Shayba and his *Muṣannaf*, see Lucas, "Where?"

⁵⁸ Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa'*, rec. Yāḥyā, *al-ṣalāt* 15, *mā jā'a fi 'l-mash bi-'l-ra's wa-l-udhnayn*, no. 77; rec. Muṣ'ab, *al-ṣalāt* 7, *bāb mā jā'a fi mash bi-'l-ra's*, no. 85.

Of the controversies reviewed above, Mālik offers the most on whether eating food touched by fire calls for renewed ablutions, a position supported only in Basra, not Kufa, to judge by Ibn Abī Shayba's presentation. Mālik presents three Prophet and six Companion reports against. The last of them expressly repudiates Iraqi practice: that Anas b. Mālik, on coming from Iraq (he was known for settling in Basra), ate some food affected by fire with fellow Companions Abū Ṭalḥa al-Anṣārī and Ubayy b. Ka'b. He then performed the minor ritual ablution but they protested: "What is this, Anas – (something) Iraqi?" Anas expressed remorse: "Would that I had not done this."⁵⁹ This report of Mālik's reads like a parody of Ibn Abī Shayba's, with a Basran *isnād*, that Anas b. Mālik was indignant because al-Ḥajjāj and his courtiers had eaten, then prayed without first performing the minor ritual ablution.⁶⁰ 'Abd al-Razzāq is a little helpful, here, providing three Medinese Prophet reports, one Meccan/Medinese Prophet report, and four Medinese Companion reports in favor of the ritual ablution, along with an unsupported report (i.e., without *isnād*) that the Basran Ma'mar (d. 153/770?) and the Medinese al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741–2?) would renew their ablutions if they had eaten food touched by fire: this confirms that there was some Medinese opinion in favor of the ritual ablution (in line with Basran Follower opinion). Indeed, Mālik is presumably arguing against such fellow Medinese, not Basrans, for only Medinese would be hurt by the allegation that their doctrine was recognizably Iraqi.⁶¹

This review of 22 other controversies does, then, confirm what others have observed of the *Muwaṭṭa'*, such as Patricia Crone: "on first reading, this book conjures up an inward-turned provincial society abiding by its local ways in more or less complete ignorance of developments outside.... Yet this impression of patriarchal innocence is totally spurious."⁶² The *Muwaṭṭa'* can be relied on to tell us Mālik's opinion and sometimes evidence he thought favorable but not very well unacknowledged influences, such as debates in Iraq, or what

59 Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa'*, rec. Yahyá, *ṣalāt* 13, *tark al-wuḍū'* *mimmā massat al-nār*, nos 54–62; rec. Muṣ'ab, *ṣalāt* 5, *bāb al-wuḍū'* *mimmā massat al-nār*, nos. 62–70.

60 Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, *k. al-ṭahāra* 62, *man kāna yarā 'l-wuḍū'* *mimmā ghayyarat al-nār*, ed. J&L, 1:95, no. 560; also 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 1:173–4, variant at 1:170. For Anas' Basran connection, see, for example, Ibn Sa'd, *Biographien*, 7/1:10–16/7:17–26, esp. 16 25–6.

61 Cf. Katz (*Body*, 101–23), who tentatively concludes that renewing ritual ablutions after eating food touched by fire was originally the practice of "ascetic circles in Basra," taken up, fitted with Prophet hadith, and unsuccessfully promoted by the caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz.

62 Crone, "Jāhilī," 196–7.

other Medinese thought; in particular, therefore, what doctrines distinguished the Medinese school in the earlier eighth century.

Finally, then, because of sketchy information about Medina before the mid-eighth century, I conclude from my review of 22 other controversies that, although the thesis of characteristic disagreement between Kufa and Basra is confirmed, there is no strong evidence here either confirming or disconfirming systematic Medinese borrowing from Basra. In the sample of 22 controversies, Mālik seems as likely to back an earlier Kufan as an earlier Basran view. This inconclusiveness is disappointing. Although admitting that my search of the evidence has been far less thorough, I take some small comfort in the precedent of a recent article by Patricia Crone, "Quraysh and the Roman Army: Making Sense of the Meccan Leather Trade." She concludes, "Did Quraysh make their wealth by organizing supplies to the Roman army? As things stand, a case can be made for it, but not proved."⁶³

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63 Crone, "Quraysh," 86.

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CHAPTER 8

God's Cleric: Al-Fudayl b. 'Iyād and the Transition from Caliphal to Prophetic Sunna

D. G. Tor*

For Patricia, with abiding affection, gratitude, and admiration

One of the most important books ever published on early Islamic history is Patricia Crone's and Martin Hinds's study *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*. In that work, Crone and Hinds established that the office of caliph originally combined both political and religious authority, with the caliph considered to be God's deputy on earth (*khalifat Allāh*), and that the office only eventually lost its religious authority to the new class of religious scholars, especially *hadīth* scholars, who arose in the mid-eighth century, claiming to be the true successors to the Prophet's magisterium.¹

However, while Crone and Hinds meticulously documented the fact that this alienation of religious authority indeed transpired, pinpointed its critical moment as having occurred during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd,² and showed that it was completed in the ninth century after the failure of al-Ma'mūn's *mīḥna*,³ they did not examine the details of the transferal during the crucial period: the personalities involved, the salient features of the turning point in the relations between caliphs and clerics, and the nature of the relations between the early Abbasid caliphs and the leading figures in the proto-Sunni

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¹ Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*.

² Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 88–90. This is what one might describe as the “bucket moment,” à la Shakespeare: “Give me the crown. Here, cousin, seize the crown;/... On this side my hand, and on that side yours. /Now is this golden crown like a deep well/ That owes two buckets, filling one another, /The emptier ever dancing in the air, /The other down, unseen and full of water:/ That bucket down and full of tears am I,/ Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high.” *King Richard II*, IV: i.

³ Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 97: “When al-Mutawakkil abolished the *mīḥna* in 234/848f., he formally acknowledged what had been pretty obvious for some time, viz. that al-Ma'mūn's attempt to enforce the role of the caliph as guide in spiritual matters had been a failure. Henceforth the caliph had to satisfy himself with political power, and the textbook view of the nature of the caliphate is substantially correct from this point onwards.”

ahl al-hadīth movement.⁴ Accordingly, this article will be devoted to examining those relations, focusing on the period they identified as the most crucial juncture or tipping point – namely, the reign of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170/786–193/809), during whose time the caliph tried to vie with leading members of the *ahl al-hadīth* in manifestations of religious piety and leadership. It will focus in particular on Hārūn's reported dealings with Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād, one of the leading ascetics and *hadīth* transmitters of that time, the proto-Sunni with whom the sources report that the caliph had the greatest personal interaction – and whose religious superiority the caliph is portrayed as having acknowledged, thus marking, after decades of undermining, the critical moment of the shift in the balance of religious authority from the caliph to the proto-Sunni clerics.

The Religio-Historical Background

The third/ninth century Sunnis to whom the caliphs from al-Ma'mūn through al-Mutawakkil lost the *mīḥna* did not, of course, just appear out of nowhere; in Juynboll's words, “The Sunnites must have had forerunners.”⁵ These forerunners were the group known as the *ahl al-hadīth*, largely ignored by scholars since Schacht's and Hodgson's time, and identified by Hodgson as “the Ḥadīth folk.”⁶ These were the eighth-century “first orthodox, or proto-Sunnites,” and they “were on the whole few in numbers”;⁷ Juynboll estimates their number at probably no more than one hundred altogether throughout the course of the eighth century. They themselves appear to have preferred the term *ahl al-sunna*,⁸ and individuals belonging to this group were also identified in the sources by the designations *ṣāḥib sunna*, *ṣāḥib ḥadīth*, or *amīr al-mu'minīn fī'l-hadīth*.⁹ This last title in particular is highly significant in the context of the rivalry for religious authority between God's caliph and the group we shall correspondingly term God's clerics, and will be returned to presently.¹⁰

⁴ The phrase proto-Sunnites for “Islam’s first orthodox” is Juynboll’s, “Excursus,” 330.

⁵ Juynboll, “Excursus,” 319.

⁶ Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:386–92. This is the group Schacht labeled “Traditionists” (*Introduction*, 28–36); he also identified the arising of this group as “the most important single event in the history of Islamic law in the second century of the hijra.” (34).

⁷ Juynboll, “Excursus,” 330.

⁸ Melchert, “The Piety of the Ḥadīth Folk,” 426.

⁹ Juynboll, “Excursus,” 319.

¹⁰ The claim it is implicitly asserting against the political authorities, as a religious variant of the caliphal title “*amīr al-mu'minīn*”, is reflected in the arrogation of other caliphal titles

They formed in reaction to the hundred years of strife and disagreement pursuant to the murder of ‘Uthmān in 656, with its resultant fracturing of the *umma*, long-term disagreement over the identity of the “imam of right guidance,”¹¹ who was supposed to be the vehicle of salvation, and the constant undermining of caliphal religious authority, which was its inevitable concomitant; and, finally, a factor which has been little noted: inevitable disillusionment, not only with the inescapable worldliness that accompanies politics and rule, but with the individual luxuriousness, worldliness, and lack of religious devotion of those claiming the Imamate, all of whom were so clearly not the most pious and zealous men of their times, in clear contravention of one of the crucial tenets of the early Islamic community (namely, that the Imam-caliph was supposed to know better than anyone else what the path of true religion was): “He knew better than anyone else because he was the best person of his time: it was his superior merit that made people follow him.”¹²

One should not underestimate the level of anguish that this religious uncertainty must have caused the pious; where was the believer to find a firm guide who would lead him to salvation? It was thus alienation, and a kind of despair, that led to the forming of the *hadīth* party: despair of discerning the true living Imam and recovering the line of religious legitimacy that had been lost at ‘Uthmān’s death caused the group that became the *ahl al-hadīth* to look to known righteous dead Imams from the past; and, once they turned toward dead Imams, it was inevitable that the greatest and purest authority among them would be the Prophet Muḥammad himself, who, after all, was not merely

as well, such as “Imām” and, later, “sultān,” in reference to leading religious figures – e.g., al-Sallāmī, *Ta’rīkh*, 86, refers to a thirteenth-century cleric as “one of the *sultāns* of the *‘ulamā’*.”

¹¹ Whose role was summarized by Crone (Crone, *God's Rule*, 22–3): “His guidance was seen as primarily legal, or in other words he declared what was right and wrong, for it was by living in accordance with God’s law that people travelled to salvation . . . Everyone who travelled with him would be saved, everyone else was lost . . . If you paid allegiance to a false imam, you were doomed, for you would necessarily end up in the same place in the hereafter as the man whose caravan you had chosen to join. Anyone who joined the wrong caravan became an unbeliever, for there was only one community of believers. It travelled under the one and only imam of guidance representing the one and only God. All this was generally agreed. But who was the imam of guidance when ‘Uthmān was killed? How could one be sure that one was travelling to Paradise rather than to Hell? That was the problem raised by the first civil war.” One might add that it was a problem that continued to fester through the time of the Second and Third Fitnas as well.

¹² Crone, *God's Rule*, 22.

an Imam but also the last and greatest of the prophets, inerrant, and the founder of the religion.

Unfortunately, Muḥammad was of course dead, which posed what might seem to be an insuperable obstacle to consulting his opinion regarding complex religious and theological questions not addressed in the Qur’ān. The *ahl al-hadīth*, however, “believed that the Prophet’s practice (*sunna*) could be recovered from *hadīth*, ‘traditions,’ that is short statements reporting the Prophet’s solutions to legal or doctrinal problems as they had arisen in his time.”¹³ Originally, there was only a scant smattering of such reports; happily, though, supply soon grew to fit the demand.¹⁴ Thus, the moral compass and guide of the community, in the eyes of the *ahl al-hadīth*, was no longer the living Imam-caliph of dubious legitimacy and religious worth, but the infallible Prophet. Of course, what this really meant, in effect, was that religious authority rested in the hands of the custodians and purveyors of the *hadīth*: the *ahl al-hadīth* themselves.

As noted above, they were, however, in the beginning (that is, the mid-eighth century) an extremely small group. Yet this tiny minority eventually succeeded in arrogating unto itself the religious authority that had once belonged to the Imam-caliph and, thanks to the honoree of this volume, we even know when the critical juncture occurred. Let us now examine how and why they succeeded. The first factor was the simplicity of the *hadīth* position. Oddly enough, Juynboll saw this as a disadvantage: he notes that the early proto-Sunnis were aware not only of their limited numbers, but also of their “less well-developed debating techniques. The majority of their anti-heterodoxy arguments were often no more than rude slogans, not rising above the level: He who says that the Qur’ān is created is an infidel . . . etc. statements repeated over and over again,” and characterizes this truculent dogmatism as “The shortcomings and on the whole primitive approach of the *ashāb sunna*.¹⁵ On the contrary, this dogmatic simplicity was actually one of their strengths for, in a public venue or a disputation, a *muhaddith* could pull out his trump card of “the Prophet said . . .” whereas his intellectually sophisticated opponent could not counter this claim without a long and involved historical and theological disquisition on why this was an incorrect and fallacious assertion. Complex positions are by nature more difficult to expound than are pithy, easily grasped slogans or dogmatic assertions presented as self-evident and axiomatic.

¹³ Ibid., 125.

¹⁴ Ibid., 126.

¹⁵ Juynboll, “Excursus,” 322.

The second factor working in favor of the *ahl al-hadīth* was their undoubted and outstanding piety and wholehearted dedication to God and the religious life. The demonstrative piety of the *ahl al-hadīth* took primarily two forms, as exemplified in the two main works of the first man described in detail as a *ṣāḥib sunna*,¹⁶ ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797): namely, *jihād*, and *zuhd*.¹⁷ These two different characteristic aspects of the religiosity of the *ahl al-hadīth* were, naturally, not mutually exclusive, and many of them – such as Ibrāhīm b. Adham, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Umar al-Awzā‘ī, and Ibn al-Mubārak himself – practiced both;¹⁸ but, whereas, all of the militants practiced some degree of asceticism, not all of the ascetics were active militants (Fudayl being one such instance).

The third factor the *ahl al-hadīth* had in their favor was political. At the same time the proto-Sunni movement was coalescing in the mid-eighth century, the caliphate itself was undergoing radical change: the Third Fitna and the ‘Abbāsid Revolution, to be precise. The ‘Abbāsid Revolution in particular includes not merely the two years of military conflict with the Umayyads, but a prolonged aftermath of social and political turmoil,¹⁹ and above all a rapid ideological and political ferment and transformation as its original Shi‘ite *da‘wa* was challenged and tested in the wake of the successful overthrow of the Umayyads.

Religious Developments under the Early ‘Abbāsid Caliphs

The ‘Abbāsids overthrew the established order in the Islamic world on a messianic Shi‘ite platform, originally claiming their legitimacy as the designated heirs of Abū Hāshim, who was the son of Muḥammad b. al-Hanafiyya, the messianic Imam of Mukhtār b. Abī ‘Ubayd’s revolt in Kufa during the Second Fitna and who, at the time of Mukhtār’s revolt in 685, was ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭālib’s sole

16 Juynboll, “Excursus,” 321. Juynboll is careful to note that Ibn al-Mubārak is not the earliest figure to be called by this term (322), merely the first for whom we have a clear description of what this meant.

17 Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-jihād*; Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-zuhd*. Pace Chabbi, “Fudayl,” 341, where she asserts that Fudayl stood apart from the Ibn Adham/Ibn al-Mubārak school of *ahl al-hadīth* by virtue of his asceticism; on the contrary, both of these latter two men were renowned not only for *jihād*, but also for their asceticism, particularly Ibn Adham, who was possibly even more rigorous in his asceticism than Fudayl (see Tor, *Violent Order*, 46–8).

18 See Tor, *Violent Order*, 46–56.

19 On which see now also Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 31–190.

surviving son.²⁰ The revolution was therefore a failure in terms of restoring legitimacy to the caliphate; it was, to say the least, an uphill battle to try to explain to the Muslim *umma* how a revolution predicated upon ‘Alid legitimacy, but which did not install one of ‘Ali’s direct descendants upon the caliphal throne, had rectified the wrongs caused by the First Fitna. The ‘Abbāsids did make an effort at justifying their peculiar revolutionary ideology, but, judging from the long succession of Shi‘ite revolts that ensued upon the revolution, culminating in the ‘Abbāsids’ eventual abandonment of the claim, most likely in the time of al-Manṣūr, it is obvious that the original revolutionary ideology was not sustainable.²¹ In Crone’s felicitous summation: “Being no ‘Alids, the Abbāsids could not be redeemers to the Shi‘ites without handing over to an ‘Alid... [therefore] the ‘Abbāsid pretensions to having accomplished Shi‘ite ambitions had to be given up.”²²

The problem was that the new claim (namely, that the true Imam and legatee of the Prophet was his uncle al-‘Abbās, and the latter’s descendants after him), was even less tenable than the original ideology;²³ al-Manṣūr perhaps therefore

²⁰ For a succinct summary of Mukhtār’s revolt and its connection to the ‘Abbāsid revolution, see W. Madelung, “Kaysāniyya,” *EI*²; still the most in-depth account of the revolt itself is Wellhausen’s chapter (Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions*, 125–45); see also Sharon, *Black Banners*, 103–40. The connection between the two revolts is made quite explicit in the closest approximation we have to a contemporaneous official record: see the opening of the chapter entitled *Akhbār al-Imāma* in Anon., *Akhbār al-dawla al-Abbāsiyya*, 165.

²¹ Although the *Akhbār al-dawla al-Abbāsiyya*, 165, attributes the abandonment of this claim to the time of al-Mahdī, it is far more likely that, as Ṭabarī appears to show, it was the outcome of the propaganda war that took place in conjunction with the revolt of Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh, “al-Nafs al-Zakiyya,” in 762, which exposed the ‘Alid justification as untenable for non-‘Alids, and in the course of which al-Manṣūr supposedly made the claim later apparently championed by al-Mahdī, that the Imamate belonged from the start to al-‘Abbās and his descendants (al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 3:208–15). This idea is bolstered by the fact, noted first by Bacharach, “*Laqab*,” 271–4, and then by Bates, “Khurāsānī Revolutionaries,” 283–7, that the entire ‘Abbāsid adoption of messianic *laqabs* in a formal, official way, beginning with “al-Manṣūr” and “al-Mahdī,” was due to this revolt – and that, in fact, the bestowal of the title “al-Mahdī” by al-Manṣūr upon his son was a direct response to al-Nafs al-Zakiyya’s styling himself by this term. Nagel, who was focused on the Shi‘ite religious significance of this revolt, completely overlooked its larger historical significance for the ‘Abbāsids (Nagel, “Ein früher Bericht,” 227–62); van Ess, on the other hand, did grasp this (van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 3:16–19).

²² Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 69.

²³ As Crone notes (*Slaves on Horses*, 70), “Mahdī’s outrageous rejection of every non-‘Abbāsid caliph, be he a companion or cousin of the Prophet, was a declaration of intent that could not very well become a programme of action: even a foolhardy caliph would hesitate to

began courting the small but spectacularly pious group of *ahl al-hadīth*. Why he and his successors did so is a matter of speculation. True, the ‘Abbāsids did not have much choice if they were looking for new allies (there were not many groups left to fall back upon for support, once the Shi‘ites, the ‘Abbāsids’ own more fervent but embarrassing supporters, the Khārijites, and Umayyad supporters were discounted), but they could have taken Ibn al-Muqaffa’s advice and asserted their own religious supremacy,²⁴ as al-Ma’mūn was eventually to try to do – when it was too late.

Crone posits that “the ‘Abbāsids were thus forced into attempts at conciliation of the very men who had usurped their religious authority.”²⁵ However, it is not so clear that in this early period the ‘Abbāsids had yet fully realized the nature of the threat that the proto-Sunnis posed to their religious authority and claims, nor that the balance had already tipped in favor of the proto-Sunnis. In fact, the *ahl al-hadīth* probably appeared refreshingly obscure, quaint, and innocuous to al-Manṣūr, since they were practically the only group extant that was not interested in the caliphate at all; true, this was only because they did not believe in the caliphal Imamate or recognize it, but no doubt the Shi‘ites were a much more obvious threat at the time and it must have seemed inconceivable to the ‘Abbāsids that the religious authority and sanctity of the caliphal Imamate were so precarious that a small coterie of grubby and, at least in part, literally unwashed zealots could vitiate their exalted calling.

It seems more likely that the ‘Abbāsids believed they could harness the popularity and piety of the *ahl al-hadīth* while not merely retaining unimpaired their own claims, but even enhancing them by sharing in the pious aura surrounding those men. The fact remains that neither al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī, nor Hārūn al-Rashīd heeded Ibn al-Muqaffa’s warning; either they did not fully grasp its significance or perhaps they felt that caliphal religious stature was too secure to change. This feeling of security is evidenced in the attempt made by caliphs from the days of al-Manṣūr through Hārūn’s time to associate themselves with and to court the more spectacular proto-Sunnis.²⁶

pick a fight with the *entire* Muslim world.” On the ideological inconsistency to which this led, see also Crone, *God’s Rule*, 92–3.

²⁴ On Ibn al-Muqaffa’s religious program *vide* Goitein, “A Turning Point,” 157; Pellat, “Ibn al-Muqaffa,” 8.

²⁵ Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 70.

²⁶ Consider, for instance, al-Manṣūr’s assiduous courting of al-Awzā‘ī and Hārūn’s (unsuccessful) attempts to court Ibn al-Mubārak; e.g., Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 6:146–51; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā'*, 8:406.

In fact, the caliphs seem to have been relieved that the *ahl al-hadīth* were not trying to wrest political authority and rule from their hands; they appear to have failed to understand the more subtle undermining of their religious claims that was taking place – or maybe they perceived it but could not believe that this handful of motley ascetics would triumph. An interesting anecdote captures this overweening confidence: when Ibn al-Mubārak died in 181/797, news of this supposedly reached Hārūn's court via his intelligence network. When Hārūn's vizier expressed relief at what he perceived as the removal of a threat, Hārūn contradicted him, stating in effect that since Ibn al-Mubārak had recognized the necessity for a political ruler, and had not been interested in claiming that position for himself, his great religious stature only added legitimacy to the caliphal regime.²⁷ What appears to have troubled Hārūn's courtiers does not seem to have occurred to Hārūn: namely, that the religious and political authorities could be divorced and that this divorce would then in turn hollow out the political authority.

Rather, the 'Abbāsids seemed to have believed that the growing religious prestige of the proto-Sunnis was either a bolster to their regime, whenever they could manage to associate themselves with these men; or could be countered by making a show of sharing in their piety through imitating their actions – which today's historian, of course, observing from a distance, can see was an impossible task for a ruler, especially one who already held court in the neo-Sasanian style. Nevertheless, beginning with al-Manṣūr, but most noticeably during the reign of Hārūn, the 'Abbāsid caliphs seem at least to have attempted to live up to the religious dimension of their Imamate, and not just by assuming pretentious messianic religious titles and rhetoric.²⁸

Thus, all the early 'Abbāsid caliphs, from al-Manṣūr through al-Rashīd, scrupulously went on pilgrimage and led the *hajj* both personally and by deputy through their heirs – and Hārūn, as we shall see presently, was exceptionally assiduous in this respect, as in other relevant ones.²⁹ The other aspect of religious life that was important in this context was engaging in and leading the *jihād*, and this facet of religious life received particular emphasis from the time of al-Mahdī through al-Rashīd; in Bonner's words, "This period thus sees the

²⁷ Abū Nu'aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:174.

²⁸ On those aspects of 'Abbāsid public relations, see, in addition to the works noted *supra*, Lewis, "Regnal Titles," 13–22, and Bonner, "al-Khalīfa al-Marqī," 89–91; note in particular the speech he cites from Ṭabarī.

²⁹ Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 2:110. In fact, Hārūn was the last caliph ever to lead the *hajj* personally.

birth of the figure of the 'ghāzī-caliph' in court ceremonial and panegyric, as in historiography.³⁰

The caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd acceded to the throne in the year 170/786. He was, famously, by far the most "be-*hajj*-ed" and the most *ghazi* of all the 'Abbāsid caliphs.³¹ These two areas – *hajj* and *jihād* – were neither accidental nor arbitrarily chosen: the militant wing of the proto-Sunnis cultivated these two religious virtues in particular, and it is stated of Ibn al-Mubārak specifically, the most prominent leader of the proto-Sunnis during al-Mahdi's and the beginning of Hārūn's reigns,³² that he would alternate between *hajj* one year and *jihād* the next (every third year he would engage in trade in order to distribute alms and finance his activities).³³ This was therefore the pattern followed by Hārūn from the time he became caliph until the year following the death of Fuḍayl b. 'Iyāq.³⁴

In fact, Hārūn's pilgrimage pattern provides some intriguing circumstantial evidence that he was deliberately modeling his behavior upon, or attempting to rival, the two most prominent proto-Sunnis of his time. It has not been remarked previously that Hārūn's *hajj* pattern changed markedly immediately after the death of Ibn al-Mubārak and that his pilgrimages ceased altogether after the year following the death of Fudayl. To wit: Hārūn made the *hajj* in the

30 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, 69. See his chapter 3, 60–106, for the campaigns undertaken by the caliphs; and Tor, *Violent Order*, 37–82 and "Privatized Jihad," for an explanation of their background and the attempts by the early 'Abbāsid caliphs to mimic the militant wing of the proto-Sunnis (obviously, this was far easier than mimicking the ascetic wing).

31 Hārūn's *jihād* activities are regarded as something unusually outstanding and are expatiated upon at some length by, e.g., al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* (lauded on 102; activities recounted on 103–7); note that many of these traditions are attributed to prominent militant proto-Sunnis. Bonner even notes that "at times there is a note of rivalry between these [militant proto-Sunni] scholars and Hārūn," without, however, drawing the present author's conclusions.

32 Juynboll's observation ("Excursus," 321) that Ibn al-Mubārak is the first person in relation to whom a definition of "*ṣāḥib sunna*" is given has already been noted *supra*.

33 See Tor, *Violent Order*, chapter 2, especially 47–56. Note also the tradition of Ibn Ḥanbal, who was a second-generation student of Ibn al-Mubārak's, lauding the *hajj* and the *jihād* as the best of works; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 14:23–4.

34 D. and J. Sourdel, *La civilisation de l'Islam*, 71, write of: "la fidélité rigoriste du calife à ses devoirs de chef de la Communauté, qui lui faisait diriger alternativement le Pélerinage à la Mekke et les expéditions guerrières saisonnières menée en territoire byzantine..." ("the rigorous fidelity of the caliph to his obligations as head of the Umma, in which he would alternately lead the pilgrimage to Mecca and the seasonal warrior expeditions into Byzantine territory").

years 170, 173, 174, 175, 177, 181, 186, and 188.³⁵ That is, throughout the period of his reign during which Ibn al-Mubārak was still alive (170–181), he adhered rigorously to Ibn al-Mubārak's schedule of going on pilgrimage at least every third year (and usually more frequently). This schedule was dramatically reduced after the death of Ibn al-Mubārak in 181 and ceased completely after the year following Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād's death in 187 (Hārūn's last pilgrimage took place in 188; the caliph died five years later, having made no further pilgrimages). In other words, once the competition was removed, Hārūn no longer felt pressured to conform to or model himself after this pious example.³⁶

When one tries to pinpoint precisely who constituted this pious example during Hārūn's reign, it is clear that the two outstanding exponents of the militant and the ascetic wings of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* or proto-Sunnis were, respectively, ‘Abdallāh Ibn al-Mubārak and Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād.³⁷ While neither entertained any reverence for the caliph's religious authority – on the contrary, they denied that he had any³⁸ – and both avoided contact with the caliph whenever possible, only Fuḍayl is reported to have had actual personal interaction with Hārūn. The non-militant wing represented by Fuḍayl, however, was far more difficult for an ‘Abbāsid to emulate, because it was the ascetic or renunciant wing, and it is upon this latter group that the present study focuses. Before turning to examine the relationship between Hārūn and Fuḍayl, though, let us first examine just who Fuḍayl was, and what were the beliefs and practices of the branch of the religious movement of which he was such an outstanding embodiment.

Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād: Life, Belief, and Practices

A methodological word of caution is perhaps in order before utilizing the accounts of the Arabic and Persian sources on Fuḍayl's life, only two of which were composed within a century of his death³⁹ and most of which appeared

35 *Vide*, e.g., al-‘Uṣfūrī, *Ta’rīkh khalīfa*, 366, 367, 368, 374, and 375.

36 While one could, of course, posit that old age played a role, the fact that Hārūn did still undertake arduous journeys to far-away places after this date – on one of which he died, which is the reason he is buried in Tūs – would seem to belie that explanation.

37 Ibn al-Mubārak's respect for Fuḍayl can be found in many traditions, e.g., al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:424: “From Ibn al-Mubārak: ‘There remains no one on the face of the earth, in my opinion, more excellent than Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād.’”

38 As noted already by Crone, *God's Rule*, 128: “It was at the hands of the Ḥadīth party that the caliphs and the scholars became rivals . . . they all came to subscribe to a thesis which implied that *no* caliph, legitimate or otherwise, could claim religious authority any more.”

39 Not counting Ibn Qutayba; see following note.

centuries later. Since we are dealing with a historical tradition that both had a fruitful retroactive imagination and copied verbatim (frequently without attribution) whole blocks of text from previous works,⁴⁰ the best methodological principle the historian has upon which to work when evaluating historical veracity is the “principle of dissimilarity” or “criterion of dissimilarity,” well known from the field of Biblical criticism,⁴¹ but not nearly so widely applied among Islamicists. This useful methodological tool means, in the Islamic context: “Roughly, what sounds most like current orthodoxy is most likely a back projection from that time, what is contrary to it is most likely to be a genuine relic of an earlier time.”⁴²

It is significant in this respect that, for example, even in the Sufi works, which attempt to claim Fuḍayl retroactively as a mystic, virtually the entirety of the material is not mystical at all, but in the renunciant vein one finds in the earliest works of *zuhd*, thus suggesting that there was indeed a body of early traditions regarding Fuḍayl's life that was passed on to later generations; that is, while the interpretation those later generations applied to this material is anachronistic, the material itself does not support the dogmatic point of these later texts and thus seems to be at least in part a genuine survival from earlier times. The same is true for the non-Sufi works in another respect: the kind of life Fuḍayl is reported to have led, and the extreme outlook he espoused, was not one that served as a model for, nor was it approximated by, Muslims of later generations.⁴³

⁴⁰ Thus, for instance, Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, 511, copies word for word what Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, 5–6:334, wrote about Fuḍayl without any attribution. This is somewhat frustrating for the historian, since Ibn Qutayba's teachers were themselves students of Fuḍayl's close associates – Ibn al-Mubārak, Ibn 'Uyayna, and so forth – so Ibn Qutayba surely must have had further information; see Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba*, 45–74.

⁴¹ E.g., Ehrman, *A Historical Introduction*, 204–6. The author is indebted to Behnam Sadeghi for this reference.

⁴² Melchert, “Exaggerated Fear,” 286. Cf. Crone's poetic description of this historiographical sifting on the basis of the criterion of dissimilarity, *Slaves on Horses*, 6–7, where she speaks of the historical residue (in this case, the Constitution of Medina, some of whose clauses are at variance with classical Islamic norms) as “stick[ing] out like a solid rock in an accumulation of rubble.” The historian is further helped in this endeavor by the fact that, thanks to all the works cited in the preceding pages, we know when proto-Sunnism, whose ideas developed in the course of the ninth century into Sunni orthodoxy, first appeared. Unfortunately, the one modern work completely devoted to Fuḍayl, Farid al-Din Rādmīhr's *Fudayl-i Iyād*, does not adopt a critical historiographical approach to the sources.

⁴³ As noted by Melchert, “Exaggerated Fear,” 297–300, the type of fevered epistemological anxiety and extreme asceticism Fuḍayl represents became greatly attenuated from the ninth century onwards, with the formation of Sunnism.

Abū ‘Alī al-Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād b. Mas‘ūd b. Bishr al-Tamīmī al-Yarbū‘ī al-Khurāsānī al-Marwazī al-Zāhid⁴⁴ was one of the leading eighth-century proto-Sunnis, an Iranian *zāhid* (“renunciant” or ascetic; this term will be discussed presently) and early transmitter of *hadīth*. He was born in Khurāsān at an unknown date, in either Abīward, the Marw area, Samarqand, or Bukhārā,⁴⁵ and died in Mecca in the year 187/803.⁴⁶ The earliest sources know virtually nothing about Fuḍayl’s background or early life before he became a renunciant (*zāhid*), other than that he was almost certainly raised in the Abīward area, or some other village closer to Marw, and moved to Kufa when he was already grown in order to study *hadīth*.⁴⁷

Kufa was a center of the early proto-Sunnite *hadīth* transmitters, or *ahl al-hadīth*, at that time; there, Fuḍayl was able to hear *hadīth* from such seminal figures as Sulaymān b. Mihrān al-A‘mash and Manṣūr b. al-Mu‘tamir.⁴⁸ Fuḍayl’s *hadīth* career throughout his life was quite illustrious: he transmitted to some of the most important proto-Sunnis and renunciants of his generation, among them ‘Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak, Yahyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qatṭān, Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna, Sufyān al-Thawrī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Bishr al-Ḥāfi, al-Shāfi‘ī, and others.⁴⁹ Fuḍayl is unanimously given the high valuation of “trustworthy” (*thiqā*) as a *hadīth*

44 One needs to consult later sources in order to obtain his full name; even then, most accounts leave out a name or *nisba* or two; see e.g., al-Anṣārī, *Tabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 28; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 48:375. The earliest biographies are even more onomastically abbreviated.

45 On the conflicting reports, see e.g., Ibn Sa‘d, *Tabaqāt* 5–6:334; Ibn Quṭayba, *al-Ma‘ārif*, 511; al-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 22–3; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt al-awliyā*, 204; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* 15:108; al-Dhahabī, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām*, 12:334; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 48: 378–81; al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 19; al-Anṣārī, *Tabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 29; and so forth. One can only conclude with the last-named author: “And God knows best.”

46 Ibn Sa‘d, *Tabaqāt*, 5–6:334; al-‘Uṣfūrī, *Ta’rīkh Khalifa*, 375; Ibn Quṭayba, *al-Ma‘ārif*, 511; al-Mas‘ūdi, *Murij al-dhahab*, 3:434, and so forth.

47 The earliest sources with this information are: Ibn Sa‘d, *Tabaqāt*, 5–6:334; Ibn Quṭayba, *al-Ma‘ārif*, 511; al-Mas‘ūdi, *Murij al-dhahab*, 3:434; al-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 22–3.

48 Ibn Sa‘d, *Tabaqāt*, 5–6:334; Ibn Quṭayba, *al-Ma‘ārif*, 511; Mas‘ūdi, *Murij al-dhahab*, 3:434; al-Dhahabī, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām*, 12:333; al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, 8:421; and so forth.

49 As usual, al-Mizzī and al-Dhahabī are the most comprehensive sources for *hadīth* transmission: see al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:105–6 and al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, 8:422; see also al-Dhahabī, *Ta’rīkh al-Islām*, 12:333; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 48:375, and Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, 8:117–47, where many of his *hadīths* are cited and one can see from whom and to whom he transmitted.

transmitter,⁵⁰ and is also referred to in the sources as “sound” (*sahīh*), an imam, and a “proof” (*hujja*).⁵¹

In the eleventh century, the Sufi tradition in its earliest biographical works appropriated Fuḍayl, among other *zuhhād*, as one of its spiritual progenitors. This is almost certainly ahistorical, the result of the Sufi need to claim religious legitimacy by tracing the history of this later phenomenon’s antecedents back to early Islamic times and to the most irreproachably orthodox religious authorities.⁵² Also beginning in the eleventh century,⁵³ some Sufi and other literature – although even in Sufi literature its adoption was not universal⁵⁴ – added a romantic story to Fuḍayl’s biography, with elaborate embellishments, according to which, in his pre-ascetic days, Fuḍayl used to “cut the road” or “hold the road” between Abīward and Sarakhs – i.e., he was allegedly either a highway robber or an illegal toll-taker trying to establish his lordship over a particular piece of territory.⁵⁵

This tale includes Fuḍayl’s intrepidly climbing walls for an amorous rendezvous with a slave girl, being struck with sudden penitence while halfway up upon hearing a Qur’ānic verse, and immediately and suddenly renouncing his previous life in order to spend his days weeping and eschewing the world

⁵⁰ E.g., Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqāt*, 5–6:334, who terms him “*thiqat fādil, ābid, kathīr al-hadīth*.”

⁵¹ E.g., al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* 15:108; al-Dhahabī, *Ta’rikh al-Islām*, 12:333.

⁵² In Chabbi’s words (Chabbi, “Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād,” 342): “On peut cependant remarquer dès à présent que la théorie selon laquelle il y aurait eu une liaison historique, au plan idéologique autant qu’organisationnel, entre les ascètes du type et de l’époque de Fuḍayl et le Soufisme postérieur paraît de moins et moins convaincante et devra certainement être révisée.” She goes on to state that, if Fuḍayl was the precursor of anything, it was of Ḥanbalism. She again emphasizes the retroactive nature of the later mystical tradition’s appropriation of *zuhd* in Chabbi, “Mouvements ascétiques et mystiques” 6.

⁵³ Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, 19. It is significant in this context that both al-Sulamī and Abū Nu‘aym follow the earlier tradition; al-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 22–7; Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā*, 8:87–148.

⁵⁴ Vide e.g., al-Anṣārī, *Tabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 28–33, from which it is absent.

⁵⁵ The latter idea is supported by the various chivalric terms applied, oddly enough, not only to Fuḍayl’s pre-repentance secular career – e.g., Ibn ‘Asākir describing him (*Ta’rikh madīnat Dimashq*, 48:380) as having been “one of the *‘ulamā’* and the *zuhhād* and the *fityān* – that is, in the beginning of his career;” and al-Hujwīrī (*Kashf al-mahjūb*, 160) describing him as having practiced *‘ayyārī* in his “road-holding” – but even when describing his religious career, perhaps hearkening back to this earlier stage; thus, al-Anṣārī (*Tabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 89) introduces Fuḍayl as follows: “He was among the great shaykhs, an *‘ayyār* of the Way [*‘ayyār-i ṭarīqat*], celebrated among his peers, and a refuge of the people.” On *‘ayyārī* and early Islamic chivalric violence *vide* Tor, *Violent Order*, especially chapters 7 and 8, and Tor, “Ayyār,” *EI*³.

in the Muslim holy city of Mecca.⁵⁶ Of course, the problem with this story is that the outcome of Fuḍayl's penitence was not, in reality, his going straight to Mecca to live as an ascetic (which is what al-Qushayrī has him do),⁵⁷ but, rather, spending several decades in Kufa memorizing *hadīth* – a much more prosaic and less fervent choice.⁵⁸

Indeed, the most fantastic of these later tales of his early life portray Fuḍayl as a highway robber-ascetic, sitting in a tent in the middle of the desert with a band of cutthroats, wearing sackcloth and prayer beads, until the tale reverts to the story of his falling in love and being struck to the heart by a Qur'ānic verse (albeit no wall-scaling is involved in this version).⁵⁹

Romantic legends aside, at some unknown date, after having sat in Kufa hearing *hadīth* for many years, Fuḍayl decided to "devote himself to the service of God,"⁶⁰ whereupon he moved to Mecca and spent the rest of his life there, practicing asceticism or renunciation (*zuhd*), and it is as the leading renunciant of his generation that Fuḍayl is primarily remembered – and also how he is described by all the pre- and non-Sufi sources.

Zuhd, or asceticism, was the path of renunciation – broadly speaking, of anything other than God, but most notably of the pleasures of this world.⁶¹ It included "self-denial, self-mortification, bodily abstinence, the renouncement of pleasures and temptations, the abandonment of dear people, etc."⁶² Thus, Fuḍayl's ascetic practices included, for instance, supererogatory stringency in

56 In addition to al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 19, this tale can be found in al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 120; Ibn Qudāma, *Kitāb al-tawwābīn*, 198; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān*, 3:481; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt al-awliyā'*, 204; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:107–8; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:423, 437, 438; and Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 48:381–4. Chabbi, "Fuḍayl b. 'Iyād," 332, is also skeptical of the tale's historical veracity.

57 Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 19.

58 Chabbi, "Fuḍayl b. 'Iyād," 338, estimates that he spent around 30 years as a *muḥaddith* in Kufa.

59 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, 89–90.

60 Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, 5–6:334; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, 51; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 3:434; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt al-awliyā'*, 204.

61 See e.g., Ibn Qutayba, *'Uyūn al-akhbār*, 2:387, where Fuḍayl defines the fundament of renunciation as being content with God (with the implication that this is to the exclusion of all else). Andrae has written of the early generation of ascetics, among whom Fuḍayl is of course numbered (*Garden of Myrtles*, 62): "We find in the ascetics of the earliest centuries of Islam a degree of bitter hatred of and contempt for the world that would do credit to the monks of the Scete desert."

62 Kinberg, "Zuhd," 27.

observing the Islamic dietary laws,⁶³ even if this led to his having “to eat dust and ashes,”⁶⁴ and also rigorous fasting, based apparently on the principle that “Three things indurate the heart: Abundance of food, abundance of sleep, and abundance of speech.”⁶⁵ Unsurprisingly, therefore, Fuḍayl also practiced sleep deprivation through following the Qur’ānically enjoined practice of nightly prayer vigils.⁶⁶ This was an important component of his renunciation; supposedly, he would visit the mosque nocturnally and pray all night, dozing intermittently whenever the heaviness of his eyelids overcame him, until the morning broke.⁶⁷ He is also quoted as pairing together vigils by night and fasting by day (*qiyyām al-layl wa-ṣiyām al-nahār*).⁶⁸

Perhaps the most fundamental component of proto-Sunni *zuhd*, though, was the cultivation of fear and grief: fear of God and the Day of Judgment,⁶⁹ and grief for one’s sins and unworthiness of salvation. Fuḍayl, therefore, as part of his *zuhd*, is reported to have spent a great deal of his time weeping.⁷⁰ Mostly,

63 A common Muslim ascetic practice, part of a search for the pure or true *halāl*; see Livne-Kafri, “Muslim Ascetics,” 117.

64 Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:109–10; al-Dhababī, *Siyar*, 8:425–6. He is placed in this context together with his associates Sufyān al-Thawrī and Ibrāhīm b. Adham, notorious for eating only clay for weeks on end while undertaking the *hajj*; see Tor, *Violent, Order*, chapter 2, for references to the latter.

65 Al-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 26. On his fasting generally see Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:94. See also Fuḍayl’s pronouncement against sleep and food, Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tarikh*, 48:422.

66 On *qiyyām al-layl* see A. J. Wensinck, “Tahadjud,” *EI*²; also Livne-Kafri, “Muslim Ascetics,” 119.

67 Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:89; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:428; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:111–12.

68 E.g., Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:98, §11488; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:429, where he is quoted as stating “If you do not determine upon night vigils and daily fasts, know that you are cut off”; similarly, Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt al-awliyā'*, 206, 207.

69 In one pithy encapsulation: “I heard al-Fuḍayl say: ‘He who fears God, no one can harm; but whoever fears anything other than God, no one can be of use to him,’” al-Dhababī, *Siyar*, 8:426. Note that the same source (8:424; found also in al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:108) also quotes Ibn al-Mubārak’s high opinion of Fuḍayl’s fear of God: “I heard Ibn al-Mubārak saying: I deemed the most devotional of people to be ‘Abd al-Azīz b. Abī Rawwād; the most God-fearing of people al-Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād; the most religiously knowledgeable of people, Sufyān al-Thawrī; and the most legally knowledgeable, Abū Ḥanīfa – I never saw his like in *fiqh*.’”

70 On weeping as part of the cultivation of *zuhd*, see for instance Ibn Qutayba’s *Bāb al-bukā'*, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, 2:318–23. In Andrae’s unforgettable description (*Garden of Myrtles*, 28): “In both [Christianity and Islam], the perfect devotee is an emaciated ascetic, dried up like a cracked bag of skin, bent like an archway, so thin that the sun shines through his

his sorrow was, as one would expect, over his own sinfulness: “Blessedness belongs to the one who has an aversion for people, loves the company of his Lord, and weeps over his sins.”⁷¹ In the same vein, he is recorded as having stated: “All grief dwindles but the grief of the penitent.”⁷²

Some of this supererogatory weeping was not caused solely by remorse, but was also bound up with the eschatological fear of divine punishment⁷³ – the sense of human unworthiness of salvation expressed by the well-known Biblical sentiment, “If you, Lord, keep a record of sins, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Psalms 130.3), but taken to a greater extreme. Thus, Fuḍayl is quoted as stating that it would have been better to have been born a dog in order not to have to undergo the Day of Judgment.⁷⁴ Another vignette relates that, upon hearing Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna preaching about the Fire in the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, Fuḍayl wept until he swooned.⁷⁵

Other reported lachrymose practices of his included weeping copiously whenever he mentioned or heard the name of God or the Qur’ān being recited; according to one such tradition:

[Ibrāhīm b. al-Ash‘ath said]: “I never saw anyone in whose breast Allāh was stronger than Fuḍayl; whenever he mentioned Allāh or [Allāh] was mentioned before him, or whenever he heard the Qur’ān, he used to

ribs, red-eyed and with deep furrows in his cheeks from the constant flow of his tears.” See also Livne-Kafri, “Muslim Ascetics,” 118.

⁷¹ Al-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 27; this is part of the phenomenon Melchert details in “Exaggerated Fear,” 288. Fuḍayl’s sense of his own unworthiness is also expressed in traditions such as the following (Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā*, 8:104, §11521): “I heard Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād saying: I took Sufyan b. ‘Uyayna by the hand in this wadi and I said to him: If you think that there remains on the face of the earth anyone more wicked than you or I, it is wretched what you thought.” A variant of this is also found in Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:429.

⁷² Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā*, 8:104, §11520.

⁷³ See Ohlander, “Fear of God,” 146–8. Overall, Fuḍayl’s philosophy is well encapsulated in the saying attributed to him in ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 97: “The fear and terror in the servant are equal to the knowledge [*‘ilm*] that is in the servant; and the renunciation of the servant in this world is equal to the pleasure of the servant in the next world.”

⁷⁴ E.g., Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā*, 8:87; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:429. Melchert, “Exaggerated Fear,” 290–4, adduces many similar examples attributed to the Ṣahāba and early Followers.

⁷⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:429; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:445. Ibn ‘Uyayna adds that he would never have chosen that subject, had he realized that Fuḍayl would be in the audience. Examples of other *zuhhād* exhibiting unbridled terror at the mere remembrance of the Day of Judgment or Hellfire can be found in Melchert, “Exaggerated Fear,” 287–90.

manifest fear and sorrow; his eyes overflowed and he would weep until anyone who was in his presence would pity him; and he was constant of sorrow.”⁷⁶

Another, related, practice of Fuḍayl's, of the *memento mori* variety, consisted of frequenting the graveyard and weeping there.⁷⁷

He also had a profoundly lugubrious effect on others, which apparently extended even to the mere recollection of Fuḍayl.⁷⁸ Thus ‘Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak is reported to have said: “‘When I looked at al-Fuḍayl, grief was renewed in me, and I hated myself,’ then he wept.”⁷⁹ Grief was, in fact, regarded by the renunciants as a highly desirable state to be cultivated, as both a providential blessing and a sign of true penitence; in the words of one tradition: “I heard al-Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād saying: ‘Whenever God loves a servant He makes great his grief; and whenever God loathes a servant he makes this world bestow favours upon him.’”⁸⁰ Al-Fuḍayl is in one tradition even depicted advising Hārūn al-Rashīd to cultivate grief:

Al-Ma’mūn told me: al-Rashīd said to me: “My eyes never saw the like of Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād . . . he said to me, ‘Empty your heart for grief and fear, in order that they may settle in it, and cut you off from disobedience, and keep you away from the Fire.’”⁸¹

It is with this background in mind that one should understand the saying attributed to Ibn al-Mubarak that “When Fuḍayl dies, grief will pass from the

⁷⁶ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:87, §11446; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:110. Similar stories quote eyewitnesses relating how they heard Fuḍayl reciting from the Qur’ān and weeping (e.g., Ibn Qudāma, *Tawwābīn*, 199).

⁷⁷ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:87, §11447; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:110. The practice of frequenting, or even living in, cemeteries was a common custom in early *zuhd*; see Livne-Kafri, “Muslim Ascetics,” 18–19.

⁷⁸ To the extent, in fact, that supposedly all he had to do was stand on the roof of the Ka‘ba and yell a sentence of reproof at the world generally in order to cause everyone to fall to the ground and weep (‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkīrat al-awliyā'*, 92).

⁷⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, 8:438.

⁸⁰ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:91; similar traditions can also be found in al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 19; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt*, 205; ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkīrat al-awliyā'*, 96. Cf. Revelation 3:19: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”

⁸¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* 8:438.

world.”⁸² Others upon whom he had a similarly morose effect included Sufyān al-Thawrī,⁸³ Bishr the Barefoot,⁸⁴ and, above all, the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.⁸⁵

Another, related, aspect of *zuhd* that Fuḍayl cultivated was the practice of solemnity or “unremitting seriousness.”⁸⁶ Regarding this last custom, al-Fudayl, according to one associate, never laughed or smiled for 30 years, until his beloved son, ‘Alī, died. He explained his smiles on that occasion as follows: “If God likes something, then I like that thing.”⁸⁷ He also reproved other proto-Sunnis for perceived lapses from gravity: “Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād saw a group of the *ashāb al-ḥadīth* jesting and laughing, so he called out to them: ‘Easy, O heirs of the prophets, thrice easy, for you are Imāms whose example will be followed.’”⁸⁸

The instance just cited brings us, finally, to the heart of the matter at hand, and to Fuḍayl’s real historical significance: namely, his being one of the most prominent figures of the proto-Sunni movement at the time when that movement was finally succeeding in undermining caliphal religious authority and establishing the position that it was they, the clerical custodians of Prophetic *hadīth*, who were the true heirs of the Prophet’s religious authority, and therefore the proper arbiters of religious questions. Fuḍayl is one of the first identifiable figures reported as having expressed such views and one sees them displayed in full force in this last tradition just cited: The ‘*ulamā’* are the heirs of the prophets and the Imams to be emulated, not the caliphs. Let us therefore now turn to examine Fuḍayl’s attitudes toward caliphs generally, and Hārūn al-Rashīd in particular.

Fuḍayl’s Relations with Hārūn

Fuḍayl’s proto-Sunni philosophy regarding the relative religious authority of the clerics and the caliphs can be gleaned in two ways: Through his reported

⁸² Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:90; al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 19; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a‘yān* 3:483; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, 48:382.

⁸³ E.g., al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, 8:439.

⁸⁴ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, 48:390. Bishr was no mean renunciant himself; for a discussion of his lack of footwear and its ascetic significance, *vide* Maher, “Biṣr,” 208–14; cf. Cooperson, *Arabic Biography*, 154–87.

⁸⁵ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, 3:434; al-Tawhīdī, *al-Baṣā’ir*, 2:30; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Sifat al-safwa*, 1:430.

⁸⁶ So described by Melchert, “The Piety of the Ḥadīth Folk,” 427.

⁸⁷ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:103; al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 20; Ibn al-Mulaqqīn, *Tabaqāt*, 207; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 3:482–3.

⁸⁸ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:103.

interactions with a specific caliph, Hārūn al-Rashīd, and through the general statements attributed to him about caliphs or the political authorities, and their merit or status in comparison with that of the nascent *'ulamā'*.

Regarding the first source of information, Fuḍayl's personal relations with Hārūn, Chabbi was skeptical, since she for some reason assumed that these must have taken place in Baghdad and there is no record of Fuḍayl's ever having gone there.⁸⁹ However, she appears to have forgotten that Hārūn spent a great deal of time on *hajj* in Mecca – spending, in fact, an amount of time there adding up to years – and that many of the reported interactions either very clearly or even explicitly take place in the sacred city (for instance, in the Ka'ba, or at Fuḍayl's house), which was of course where Fuḍayl resided throughout his renunciant (as opposed to his earlier *hadīth*) career.⁹⁰

When one examines the purported interactions between Fuḍayl and Hārūn, one is first struck by the fact that Fuḍayl is unambiguously portrayed as having the upper hand in two ways: he is always the instructor or reprover and, with one exception, Hārūn always seeks Fuḍayl's company, never the reverse. Let us adduce these purported historical contacts between the two men, beginning with the anomalous episode, in which, nevertheless, we see the same consistent message being conveyed about the relative religious status of Fuḍayl and Hārūn:

1. According to the earliest history on the subject, in the year 184/800 the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, apparently in need of cash, appointed an official, 'Abdallāh b. al-Haytham b. Sām, to torture a broad range of people, including government functionaries, dihqāns, estate owners, and others, in order to extract supposed tax arrears from them. At this point, Fuḍayl intervened:

Fuḍayl b. Iyād went in to [the caliph], for he had seen the people [*al-nās*] being tormented for the sake of the taxes [*kharāj*], and said: “Relieve them, for I heard the Messenger of God says: ‘Whoever torments the people in this world, God will torment him on the Day of Resurrection.’”

89 Chabbi, “Fuḍayl,” 332.

90 A better objection to the historicity of the accounts is the way in which they progressively enlarge Fuḍayl's superiority over Hārūn; the further removed in time, the more complete Fuḍayl's dominance over the caliph is depicted as having been. The historicity question will be addressed in the concluding section of this article.

So [Hārūn] ordered that the people be relieved of the torment, and the torment was lifted from this year.⁹¹

This source, and Fuḍayl's appearance in it (of which Chabbi was apparently unaware), is particularly valuable; not only is it the only surviving ninth-century source that documents the purported personal interaction between Fuḍayl and Hārūn, but it is also an historical rather than a hagiographical work. Even though it presents Fuḍayl as the initiator of the contact, his purpose was far from sycophantic: he came in order to rebuke Hārūn for his behavior.

This is also the key element in all the other reported dealings of the two: Fuḍayl is Hārūn's clear religious superior and instructor, and he administers reproofs and warnings to the caliph, which usually end in Hārūn's dissolving in tears (and, in more emphatic versions, swooning). Thus, with the exception of the report we have just examined, the various stories all present Hārūn as having initiated the contact: it is he who seeks and craves Fuḍayl's company and wisdom.⁹²

2. The earliest report after al-Ya'qūbī's is found in al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab*. According to this account, Hārūn (obviously while in Mecca) summoned prominent religious men of the town to his presence. The account then reads as follows:

Sufyān b. 'Uyayna related: al-Rashīd summoned us, and we two entered before him, Fuḍayl entering behind, with his head veiled with his outer garment. [Fuḍayl] said to me: "O Sufyān, which of them is the Commander of the Believers?"

I replied: "This one," and I pointed out al-Rashīd.

[Fuḍayl] said to [the caliph]: "O you of the handsome face, are you he who holds the matter of this *Umma* in your hands and upon your neck? You have taken upon yourself a great matter."

And al-Rashīd wept, then gave to every man of us a large sum of money, and everyone accepted it except al-Fuḍayl. Al-Rashīd said to him: "O Abū 'Alī, if you do not regard it as lawful, then give it to a debtor, and satisfy by

⁹¹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, 2:291. Since the first pilgrimage led by Hārūn after the implementation of this policy was the succession pilgrimage of 186/802, this must have been the occasion on which Fuḍayl administered his reproof.

⁹² In fact, there exists the distinct possibility that subsequent reports may simply be an exegetical elaboration of the significance of this and the next episode we shall examine.

means of it the hungry, and clothe by means of it the naked." But [Fuḍayl] asked of [al-Rashīd] to be excused from [taking] it.

When we went out I said to him: "O Abū 'Alī, you committed an error; you should have taken it and directed it to the gates of piety." But he took hold of my beard, and said: "O Abū Muḥammad, you are the *faqīh* of the town and one who is looked up to, and you would commit an error like this?"⁹³

Al-Mas'ūdī's report is echoed in subsequent elaborations, in all of which Fuḍayl is still summoned to al-Rashīd's presence and warns him about the weighty matter with which he has been entrusted; they nearly all also contain some reference to Hārūn's being fair of face, with or without the further remark that it would be a shame for such a face to be marred in the eternal Fire.⁹⁴

3. A report by al-Tawḥīdī, according to which Hārūn expressed to Sufyān b. 'Uyayna the desire to visit Fuḍayl, upon which Sufyān tried to dissuade him from doing so, since he feared Hārūn would not appreciate the treatment he would be meted. Report of this reached Fuḍayl, who stated that he would give the caliph spiritual counsel if the latter were to visit him. Sufyān therefore, in this version, accompanied Hārūn on a visit to Fuḍayl's house, and Hārūn not only gets duly berated and weeps, as in the later versions recounted below, but begs Fuḍayl for more of this salutary treatment.⁹⁵

4. A late and very widespread anecdote, which seems to be based upon al-Tawḥīdī's account and is adduced in several variants,⁹⁶ usually related by al-Fadl b. Rabī' (who at that time would have been Hārūn's close companion and an important official at court),⁹⁷ or in which, at least, al-Fadl is one of the

93 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murīj*, 3:434.

94 Abū Nu'aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:108, §11535; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 3:481–2; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh*, 48:436; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:440. In these last two versions, Fuḍayl is originally reluctant to attend to al-Rashīd in the Ka'ba, but obeys the summons only in order to remonstrate with the caliph. These last versions also end differently and possibly reflect a more authentic and less didactic tradition: Hārūn sighs and weeps until one of his attendants "escorts" Fuḍayl out – that is, he is essentially thrown out of the Ka'ba by the caliphal entourage.

95 Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Baṣā'ir*, 2:30–1.

96 It can be found in, for instance, Abū Nu'aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:108–9; Huwjīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 122–4; Ibn al-Jawzī, *'Uyūn al-hikāyāt*, 46–8; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:112–15; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:428–31; etc.

97 Al-Fadl b. Rabī' held different posts, but became *hājib* in 179/803. Al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā'*, 233; Sourdel, *Le Vizirat*, 1:144 (see also the brief chapter on al-Fadl's role generally, 1:183–94).

leading protagonists (although this role is occasionally attributed to one of the Barmakids instead).⁹⁸ In these accounts, Hārūn, while on Ḥajj, was seized with spiritual disquiet, and sought someone who could give him guidance. The main elements of this story are as follows:

- a) Al-Faḍl first took Hārūn to see other proto-Sunni religious luminaries of the time – Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna, and according to some versions, after leaving Sufyān, also ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘anī – but both these men failed to satisfy Hārūn’s spiritual hunger, showing themselves to be too worldly for the task, in their running out to greet the caliph and stating sycophantically that they would have come to him had he summoned them; in their willingness to accept money from him as he departed; and, most of all, in their not reprimanding him and preaching a hellfire sermon to him.⁹⁹
- b) Finally, Hārūn reached Fuḍayl’s house, where he met with a reluctant reception (he interrupted Fuḍayl’s orisons and/or Qur’ān readings). Fuḍayl’s initial reaction is usually reported as “What have I to do with the Commander of the Believers, or he with me?”; and he evinces no desire whatsoever to meet or converse with Hārūn, thus asserting at the outset Fuḍayl’s independence from the caliph, and emphasizing that it is, on the contrary, the caliph who is seeking – and therefore apparently needs – the cleric.¹⁰⁰ We shall see both these themes made explicit when we examine Fuḍayl’s reported aphorisms and statements.
- c) After the caliph was admitted – or at least suffered to intrude – Fuḍayl extinguished the lamp, either in order to avoid seeing Hārūn, or in order to make it more difficult for the caliph to find him and disturb his religious activi-

98 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:441 states that it was Yahyā b. Khālid the Barmakid, together with his son Ja‘far, who were Hārūn’s companions on this occasion. They are known to have accompanied the caliph on the succession pilgrimage of 186; Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā'*, 221ff; Sourdel, *Le Vizirat*, 1:151–2. ‘Aṭṭār’s version apparently mixes up the two officials named al-Faḍl (that is, al-Faḍl b. Rabī‘ and al-Faḍl b. Yahyā al-Barmakī); ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira* *al-awliyā'*, 92.

99 Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:108; ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira* *al-awliyā'*, 92; Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 122; Ibn al-Jawzī, *‘Uyūn al-hikāyāt*, 46; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:112–13; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:428–9; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh* 48:437ff.

100 E.g., Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, 48:434–5. In the first version he adduces, in which Hārūn’s accompanying official is Abū Qatāda, the anecdote ends here: Hārūn actually goes away upon being refused admittance.

ties. While groping in the dark, the caliph's hand encounters Fuḍayl's, and the latter exclaims how soft it is and remarks that he hopes it will escape the Fire.¹⁰¹

d) Fuḍayl reproves Hārūn, either spontaneously or at the request of the latter (who in that version is already weeping), and launches into several anecdotes, all involving the idealized and exemplary conduct of the caliphal ancestor al-‘Abbās and of ‘Umar II, as well as an admonishment regarding the solemnity and heavy responsibility of the burden of rule and the ever-present danger – for rulers who fail to execute satisfactorily their obligations toward the Muslims – of burning in Hellfire forevermore.¹⁰²

e) Hārūn weeps bitterly and either faints or appears to be on the verge of doing so. In some versions al-Faḍl then reprimands Fuḍayl for his cruelty and receives the retort that it is he and his friends who are killing the caliph, in jeopardizing the caliph's salvation, whereas Fudayl's criticism is purely salutary.¹⁰³

f) In stark contrast to his colleagues, Fuḍayl absolutely refuses to accept any money from the caliph, even in order to give it away. In some versions, he chides Hārūn for having requited his good offices with evil by having offered him money: "I call you to salvation, and you cast me into temptation."¹⁰⁴

To the wary historian, this reported encounter, which is the longest and most elaborate, appears even more historically suspect than the earlier incidents. First, because it is so clearly based upon the three earlier, briefer, and more sober encounters adduced above. Second, it is also a bit too reminiscent of the literary character of Hārūn portrayed in *Alf layla wa-layla*: a restless, romantic soul given to roaming about by night.¹⁰⁵ And, finally, this account is far too didactic and suspiciously detailed in suddenly, several hundred years

¹⁰¹ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:109; ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira al-awliyā'*, 92–3; Huwjīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 122–3; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Uyūn al-hikāyāt*, 46; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:113; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:429; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, 48:438.

¹⁰² Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:109; ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira al-awliyā'*, 92–3; Huwjīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 123; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Uyūn al-hikāyāt*, 46–7; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:113–14; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:430; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, 48:439.

¹⁰³ One especially illuminating version, ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira al-awliyā'*, 93, recounts that Fuḍayl strongly reproves the vizier by addressing him as "Hāmān"; on Hāmān as the embodiment and symbol of the evil vizier, see Silverstein, "Hāmān's Transition," 303–5. See also the rest of the article for what this possibly implies about Hārūn as ruler and the Hāmān – Pharaoh pairing.

¹⁰⁴ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:110; ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira al-awliyā'*, 94; Huwjīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 124; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Uyūn al-hikāyāt*, 47–8; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:114; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:430–1; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, 48:439–40.

¹⁰⁵ The earliest detailed accounts of Hārūn's lifestyle – e.g., throughout Mas‘ūdī's *Murij* – make it far more likely that Hārūn spent his nights drinking.

after all previous accounts, being privy to the record of entire conversations that stretch out over several pages.

5. A reported personal interaction between Fuḍayl and Hārūn in a dream that illuminates the relationship between the cleric and the caliph, and the religious standing of the former in the caliph's eyes. As with the anecdote we just examined in example #4, the historicity of the reported contact between Fuḍayl and Hārūn in the dreams of pious figures is dubious, to say the least; the message being conveyed is therefore, in the eyes of the cautious historian, probably more indicative of the already formulated Sunni attitude of the reporting authors' century rather than an indication of the early crystallization of that attitude in Fuḍayl's time. In any case, it must at least be noted and acknowledged, since the dream contact does appear more than once in the sources.

The device of a dream in which the moral status of its posthumous protagonist is revealed to the pious dreamer is a common one in classical Islamic sources and in this case the message being delivered is uniform and accords with what we have already seen: the dream situation unambiguously demonstrates Fuḍayl's superior religious authority. In this dream, Fuḍayl appears standing upon a chest handing out Qur'āns; among the supplicants are Hārūn al-Rashīd and Sufyān b. 'Uyayna, but Fuḍayl does not entrust anyone with the precious volume of revelation.¹⁰⁶ The symbolism of all of this is unambiguous: it is Fuḍayl who stands in the raised position, Fuḍayl who is in charge of the Qur'ān, and only Fuḍayl who is deemed worthy of it.

All these reported instances of the personal contact between Fuḍayl and Hārūn constitute, however, only one category of evidence upon which to evaluate the historical memory of the relationship between caliph and cleric. The second category lies in the reported attitudes of the two parties toward each other.

Caliphal – Clerical Attitudes toward Each Other

The final piece of evidence demonstrating the success of the proto-Sunni revolution in reversing the respective religious authority of the proto-Sunni clerics and the caliph – the Shakespearean “bucket moment,” as it were – are the reported statements of Fuḍayl and the caliph regarding one another, and the attitudes expressed therein. There are not many recorded pronouncements by

¹⁰⁶ E.g., Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8: 93 §11468; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:428–9; 433.

Hārūn about Fuḍayl, and these appear only in the later comprehensive compendia; it is therefore impossible to evaluate their historicity.

Whatever their authenticity, though, the statements reported by the sources as having been made by Hārūn al-Rashīd about Fuḍayl are uniformly respectful and positive. Thus, one witness testifies: “I heard al-Rashīd say: ‘I never saw among the religious clerics [‘ulamā’] anyone more venerable than Mālik, and no one more God-fearing than Fuḍayl.’”¹⁰⁷ Another tradition states:

Al-Ma’mūn said to me: Al-Rashid told me: “My eyes never saw the like of Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyāq. He said to me, after I had entered his presence, ‘O Commander of the Believers, empty your heart for sorrow and fear, so that they may take up their abode in it, and cut you off from rebellion against God and keep you distant from the Fire.’”¹⁰⁸

The material is more abundant – and earlier – regarding Fuḍayl’s reported thoughts about the caliphate generally and Hārūn specifically. Fuḍayl’s philosophy as expressed in these statements, unsurprisingly, asserts the general superiority of the nascent ‘ulamā’ to the caliphs, and especially their superior dignity. For instance, he is said to have stated that it is not seemly for the “bearer of the Qur’ān” (by which he clearly means the ‘ulamā’) to have a need for any person, “neither for the caliphs nor for anyone other than them”; rather, he thought that the natural order of things was for all those others to need him.¹⁰⁹ In the same vein, another source reports him as stating: “If our ‘ulamā’ had self-command they would not run to the gates of these – that is, kings [mulūk].”¹¹⁰

In short, it is clear that Fuḍayl’s view in the written tradition was the new and revolutionary one of the *ahl al-hadīth*, which placed the religious status and dignity of the proto-Sunni clerics as a body much higher than the status of the caliphs. Note that he does not deny the political importance of the caliph; according to one tradition (related through an *isnād* that includes ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, no less),

I heard Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyāq saying: “There is not upon the face of the earth anyone more odious to me than Hārūn, and no one whose existence is dearer to me than his; if it were said, ‘Decrease from your life and add to

¹⁰⁷ Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:109; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:425; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, 48:388.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, 48:388.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt*, 24.

¹¹⁰ Abū Nu’aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā’*, 8:94, §11475. Obviously, the use of this term would in itself have constituted a derogatory comment on the caliphs; *vide*, e.g., Crone, *God’s Rule*, 44–6.

his life,' I should do it; and if I were to choose between his death or this one's death – meaning his son Abū 'Ubayda – then . . . I should choose the death of [Abū 'Ubayda]."¹¹¹

This view regarding caliphal political necessity, however, went hand-in-hand with a low opinion of the caliphs' religiosity and a negation of their religious necessity.¹¹² Thus, regarding caliphal religious practice, Fuḍayl supposedly retailed the following story:

Iblis said: "O Lord, the caliph [*al-khalīfa*] loves you and hates me, but rebels against you and obeys me." Allāh, may He be exalted, said: "We grant pardon to them [*sic*] for their obedience to you, because of their hatred for you; we grant pardon to them for their rebellion against Me because of their love for Me."¹¹³

This story, obviously, is a not-so-oblique expression by Fuḍayl of what he thought of the level of caliphal religious practice and purity of life. It is similarly confirmed by the tradition cited above in which Hārūn exclaimed to Fuḍayl: "What an ascetic you are!" and Fuḍayl rejoined that the Commander of the Believers was a far greater one, since whereas he, Fuḍayl, renounced only the pleasures of this world, which are transitory, Hārūn renounced those of the Next World, "and it is lasting."¹¹⁴

Another point that Fuḍayl's pronouncements in the sources unmistakably assert is that it is the proto-Sunni clerics, rather than the caliphs, who are the heirs of the Prophet. This is stated both obliquely – for instance, in Fuḍayl's critique of most of the '*ulamā'* for dressing like "Chosroe and Caesar" rather than the Prophet: "for Muḥammad did not place brick upon brick, nor city upon city; therefore religious knowledge [*īlm*] was ascribed to him and they obeyed

¹¹¹ Abū Nu'aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:107–8, §11534.

¹¹² Except insofar as, when righteous, they provided a role model for the Muslims. Thus, Fuḍayl is purported to have said that if he could have only one prayer answered, it would be for the Imām, since "the piety of the Imām is the piety of the servants and the lands . . . As for the righteousness of the country, if the people believe in the iniquity of the Imām, disorders will flourish." Abū Nu'aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:94–5, §11474; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:434.

¹¹³ Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Baṣā'ir*, 1:196.

¹¹⁴ E.g., Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Baṣā'ir*, 2:172; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt*, 206; Ibn Khallikān, *Waṣayāt*, 3:482.

him” – and explicitly, in the statement that “the religious wise men [*hukamā'*] are the heirs of the Prophet.”¹¹⁵

Fuḍayl's attitude toward the ruler is also typical of the proto-Sunnis in his belief that it is best for proto-Sunnis to keep away from the caliph and lesser rulers, and above all never to accept money from them. This ideology is expressed quite powerfully in the following testimony:

I heard Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād saying: “Verily, if a man were to approach a stinking corpse it would be better for him than if he were to approach these” – that is, the political authorities [*al-sultān*] – and I heard him say: “A man should not associate with [the authorities] … [The man who avoids associating with the political authorities] is more praiseworthy among us than the man who performs nightly prayer vigils [*yaqūmu'l-layl*] and fasts during the day and makes the *hajj*, performs the *'umra* and goes on *jihād* in the path of God and has to do with [the political authorities].”¹¹⁶

And just in case any of his disciples somehow missed the point, Fuḍayl is also reported by an eyewitness as having stated: “There is nothing incumbent upon a man except that he have in him three characteristics: That he not possess desire, not abuse the *salaf*, and not associate with the ruler [*al-sultān*].”¹¹⁷ On other occasions Fuḍayl exhorted his fellow clerics: “What have you to do with kings [*mā lakum wa-lil-mulūk*]?”, explaining that none of them (i.e., no ruler) is more important than the cleric, since the latter are pursuing the “path of the Next World”, and also warning the clerics not to be the ruler’s followers, stating that this is “not seemly for a cleric [*‘ālim*].”¹¹⁸

Most importantly, as we have seen previously in Fuḍayl's attitude when he was offered money by Hārūn, the proto-Sunni clerics were expected to keep their hands unsullied by refusing to accept gifts – especially monetary ones – from the caliph or any other ruler. Accordingly, Fuḍayl “would live from the

¹¹⁵ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:94, §11475. Hinds notes the significance of this dogma (Hinds, “Miḥna,” 243) regarding its final triumph some half a century later: “It was now unquestionably the *'ulamā'*, rather than the caliphs, who were ‘the legatees of the prophets’ … and henceforward it would be they who, armed with this spiritual authority, and at a distance from those who held temporal power, elaborated classical Islam.”

¹¹⁶ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:101, §11501.

¹¹⁷ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:107, §11529.

¹¹⁸ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:105, §11523.

gift of Ibn al-Mubārak and similarly generous people, and would refrain from [accepting] the rewards of kings [*al-mulūk*].”¹¹⁹

Conclusions

In sum, the reported history of the relations between Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād and the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd provides the expression, both implicit and explicit, in word and in deed, of the moment when the proto-Sunni worldview gained the upper hand, and God’s erstwhile deputy was consequently demoted in the eyes of Islamic mainstream consensus (*ijmā*) to the position of the Prophet’s political deputy or policeman. At the heart of this outlook lay the conviction that the *ahl al-hadīth* themselves, rather than the caliphs, were the Prophet’s true heirs in the only sense that mattered to them: the religious, rather than the political one. Fuḍayl’s religious snubbing of Hārūn, together with the caliph’s corresponding humility before him, is an acknowledgment of the clerics’ religious superiority.

Fuḍayl’s career exemplifies both the reasons why the proto-Sunnis won – their unwavering and spectacular religious dedication and commitment, the simplicity of their theological position, and their self-proclaimed authentic knowledge of Muḥammad’s extra-Qur’ānic sayings and doings – and how they went about doing so: by fearlessly trumpeting their own superiority and not hesitating to present themselves as acting as the caliph’s religious instructors and betters in their personal interactions with him. Over time, they succeeded; Fuḍayl’s success was the culmination of decades of obstinate *ahl al-hadīth* perseverance and dedication. Fuḍayl’s low opinion of the caliphs’ religiosity and negation of their religious necessity are a very far cry from the original religious and salvific authority associated with the Imamate during, say, ‘Umar’s time, and a radical reordering of early Islamic religious authority.

That the balance of religious power had indeed shifted can be seen most strikingly in a comparison of the differing reactions reported among the caliphs and their retinue to the gadflies of the *ahl al-hadīth* from early ‘Abbāsid times through Hārūn’s time. During al-Mansūr’s day, the caliph’s supporters were ready to behead al-Awzā’ī for what was perceived as his insolence in daring to reprove the caliph religiously;¹²⁰ al-Mahdī himself nearly beheaded Sufyān al-Thawrī, who subsequently spent the last year of his life in hiding from that

¹¹⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 8:442. Note that the Islamic caliph and his deputies are once again referred to as “kings” rather than caliphs or Imams.

¹²⁰ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 6:147–51.

caliph;¹²¹ and Ibn al-Mubārak feared even to meet with Hārūn.¹²² But Fuḍayl, apparently, enjoyed absolute impunity. The contrast with al-Awzā‘ī’s situation in particular, and the attitude of the caliphal entourage toward the respective clerics, is striking: when Fuḍayl begins reprimanding the caliph in far more scathing terms than any ever employed to al-Manṣūr’s face, the only reaction of Hārūn’s vizier was to say to himself: “He is going to speak to [Hārūn] this night pure speech from a pious heart.”¹²³

In the end, it is this undeniable historical progression preserved across a wide swath of texts that obviates the question of the historicity of the specific incidents reported in those texts: all of these memories of the second half of the eighth century were preserved much later by Sunnis anxious to glorify the memory of the early *muḥaddithūn*. Why, then, does the portrayal of caliphal relations with Fuḍayl differ from the same texts’ portrayal of the caliphal attitude toward the earlier figures? After all, tenth and eleventh-century authors were as remote from Ibn al-Mubārak or Sufyān al-Thawrī as from Fuḍayl – but the fact remains that the way in which they report Sufyān al-Thawrī’s relationship with al-Mahdī or Ibn al-Mubārak’s relationship with Hārūn differs fundamentally from the manner in which they report Fuḍayl’s relationship with Hārūn. Furthermore, this difference they depict is contrary to their programmatic interest, which would have lain in claiming or depicting the ‘*ulamā*’ as having always constituted the religious authority, as classical Sunni salvation history maintains; a change in the spiritual relationship and relative authority of the two parties at this juncture supports Crone and Hinds, not the Sunni *heilsgeschichte* narrative.

In other words, this is where Crone’s solid-rock-amidst-rubble and the aforementioned “criterion of dissimilarity” come into play: the difference in the portrayal of Fuḍayl’s relationship with Hārūn from that of earlier proto-Sunnis’ relationships with their respective caliphs, since it is inimical to the Sunni dogma and beliefs of the later authors who preserve the record of it, indicates that there is indeed some kind of historical memory being preserved in these narratives, if not historical fact; even if Fuḍayl’s superiority over Hārūn has been grossly exaggerated, the vital point is that the sources do remember a change as having occurred in the balance of authority in the relationship between proto-Sunni clerics and the caliph. Whether the recollection is

¹²¹ Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, 3:394.

¹²² Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1:162.

¹²³ Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, 8:429; similarly Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 8:109. For a very different view of the historical interpretation of the biographies of al-Awzā‘ī and Sufyān al-Thawrī, cf. Judd, “Competitive Hagiographies,” 26–7; 36–7.

precise or impressionistic is impossible to ascertain; but something clearly caused the historical memory of a change in relationship between caliph and cleric beginning in al-Fuḍayl's time.

Fuḍayl's historical significance, therefore, lies in his having been the representative of the proto-Sunni movement in the interactions between that movement and the caliph during Hārūn's reign, at precisely the moment when the *ahl al-hadīth*'s decades-long, cumulative, slow undermining of caliphal religious authority was finally bearing fruit and establishing the position that it was they, the clerical custodians of Prophetic *hadīth*, who, as the true heirs of the Prophet's religious authority, were therefore the proper arbiters of religious questions and the real imams of guidance. There could be no clearer demonstration of the triumph of the *ahl al-hadīth* than the accounts, whether real or symbolic, of Fuḍayl's relationship with Hārūn: in place of God's caliph, perpetuating and acting as arbiter over a living Sunna, there is God's cleric, custodian of the *hadīth* regarding the dead Prophet, and assuming the position of religious authority and spiritual adviser to the Imam himself.¹²⁴

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¹²⁴ Giving the last word to our honoree (Crone, *God's Rule*, 127–8): "The adherents of the Ḥadīth said that the Sunna was what the Prophet had said and done as recorded in Ḥadīth... Their point was that all guidance was sealed in the past. The Prophet had been the last window onto God's will. The window was now shut forever, not only in the sense that there would be no more scriptures, but also in the sense that there could be no further sources of Sunna... religious authority rested entirely on knowledge (*ilm*) of the Qur'ān and Prophetic Ḥadīth... the greengrocers of Kufa were more authoritative than the caliph if they had Ḥadīth to offer along with their beans."

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Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn and the Politics of Deference

Matthew S. Gordon

1

Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn governed Egypt for 16 years (254/868–270/884) on behalf of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate. At the height of his reign, the *amīr* came to possess considerable fiscal, military and political sway, and yet, for all the influence that accrued to him as a result, he opted for what I will call a “politics of deference” vis-à-vis the Iraqi center. The result was an unresolved tension that became especially stark in Ibn Ṭūlūn’s final years in office. The same ambiguity is reflected in the assessment of modern historians who can seem uncertain in their characterization of his reign. Ibn Ṭūlūn’s political options, as one would expect, were bounded by a combination of immediate and long-term factors. To answer the question posed here – why did Ibn Ṭūlūn not act in more resolute fashion? – I will privilege two such factors.

The *amīr* entered al-Fustāṭ, as the newly appointed deputy governor, on a Wednesday, 23 Ramaḍān 254 AH (868 CE).¹ He assumed full administrative powers within a few short years, emerging as a significant broker of Near Eastern politics. His achievements included the creation of an energetic, if short-lived, dynastic polity into which Ibn Ṭūlūn incorporated rule over Syria and the Islamic – Byzantine frontier zone (the *Thughūr*); the raising of a new administrative center at al-Qaṭā’i‘ (of which his famous mosque was a singular feature); the organization of an Egypt-centered bureaucracy; and a dynamic economy reliant on agrarian production, mining, transregional commerce, and manufacturing, particularly in textiles. His death, in 270/884, thus brought short a highly visible career. (Ibn Ṭūlūn fell ill outside Ṭarsūs and died some months later, in al-Qaṭā’i‘, at the age of 49).²

Discussion of Ibn Ṭūlūn’s career turns inevitably to the question of imperial dissolution. Michael Bonner and Hugh Kennedy, in recent accounts, treat local

¹ For this date, see Ibn Sa‘id, *Mughrib*, 76, and al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 42.

² On Ibn Ṭūlūn’s career, see Becker, *Beiträge*, 2:149–98; Bianquis, “Autonomous Egypt,” 91–104; Bonner, “Ibn Ṭūlūn’s Jihad”; Corbet, “Life and Works”; Frantz, “Saving and Investment,” esp. 39–65; Hassan, *Tulunides*; Kāshif, *Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn*; and Randa, “Tulunid Dynasty.” Also see Gordon, “Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn,” *EI*³, and Hassan, “Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn,” *EI*².

state-building and other patterns of autonomous activity, in Egypt and across the empire, as both symptom and cause of ‘Abbāsid fragmentation.³ But, if each such development marked the transition to a “post-imperial” world, it is also the case that the trajectory of decline extended over decades. The ‘Abbāsids and their allies, in other words, proved capable of defending imperial interests against most comers into the first part of the fourth/tenth century. The Ṭūlūnids are typically seen as an example. Following Ibn Ṭūlūn’s demise, his son, Khumārawayh, would take over for twelve years, but, on his assassination, things quickly unraveled; Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān’s assault on al-Qaṭā’ī in 292/905 brought the dynasty’s history to a close. The Ṭūlūnids reigned for only some 30 years, a short stretch relative to that of such later Egyptian regimes as the Fāṭimids, Ayyūbids, and Mamlūks. Ṭūlūnid rule, however brilliant, endured but a long moment.

2

The question of how best to explain Ibn Ṭūlūn’s cautious approach to governance might be divided. Did Ibn Ṭūlūn pursue the creation of an independent state in Egypt?⁴ Steps on his part suggest that he did not. Take, for example, his decision to transfer substantial tribute from Egypt to the Iraqi capital on at least two occasions.⁵ Al-Ya‘qūbī, who served in the Ṭūlūnid finance bureau in Barqa,⁶ reports that Ibn Ṭūlūn transferred to Iraq some 2,100,000 dirhams, along with *tirāz* and other goods, this in 257/871–2.⁷ Al-Balawī reports on the second shipment of tribute; he has the *amīr* transfer 1,200,000 dinars, and similar goods, to the imperial treasuries in 262/875–6.⁸ But such indications sit

³ Bonner, “Waning,” and Kennedy, “Decline and Fall.”

⁴ Frantz, “Saving and Investment,” 13, 29, 46, 68, and Kennedy, *Prophet*, 309, maintain that he did not. Bianquis, “Autonomous Egypt,” 91, 103, and Randa, “Tulunid Dynasty,” 2 and *passim*, seem less certain; each refers to Ibn Ṭūlūn’s “autonomous state.” Hassan, *Tulunides*, and Kashif, *Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn*, refer directly to the independence of Ṭūlūnid Egypt. Hassan, writing at the heyday of the anti-colonial struggle against Great Britain, makes little secret of his interest in Ibn Ṭūlūn as an Egyptian ruler *tout court*: Ibn Ṭūlūn’s polity represented “la première formule de cette indépendance” (*Tulunides*, 7). Kashif, *Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn*, 4, heavily reliant on Hassan’s work, has Ibn Ṭūlūn among the “heroes” of Egypt’s Arab past, alongside Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī and al-Zāhir Baybars, this despite their non-Arab ethnic origins.

⁵ See Frantz, “Saving and Investment,” 55.

⁶ Ibn Sa‘īd, *Mughrīb*, 122.

⁷ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta‘rīkh*, 2: 621–2.

⁸ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 80–1.

uncomfortably with the (abundant) evidence that Ibn Tūlūn devoted himself to securing primacy over Egypt and Syria. His early biographers, Ibn al-Dāya and al-Balawī, represent him as single-minded in this regard. Then a second question: did Ibn Tūlūn, by engaging in at least two campaigns of territorial expansion into Syria, Palestine, the northern part of al-Jazīra, and the *Thughūr*, seek to challenge ‘Abbāsid suzerainty? Here, too, the evidence is mixed. Ibn Tūlūn, in circumstances that offered opportunity to march on Samarra, declined to do so. But, then, there is no ignoring his decision to march, heavily armed, twice into the Levant. In the course of his campaigns, he billeted a considerable army in al-Raqqā,⁹ and dispatched a force to the *Hijāz*.¹⁰

These developments, again, speak of an ambiguity of purpose. At each turn, when one or another path lay open, the *amīr* chose half steps. The sources treat it as a pattern. To explain it, reference to the relative vitality of the ‘Abbāsid state might suffice.¹¹ The caliphate, despite the embarrassments of the Samarra period (c. 221/836–279/892),¹² could still marshal the strength – military, fiscal, and ideological – sufficient to its needs.¹³ But this is to forget that the final defeat of the Tūlūnid sultans occurred well after Ibn Tūlūn’s passing. This discussion turns on the view that, at the apogee of his reign, Ibn Tūlūn was positioned to mount an existential challenge to ‘Abbāsid rule. The point at which he achieved greatest influence can be debated; one choice is, to use Hassan and Bonner’s phrase, the “Damascus Assembly” of 269/883.¹⁴ The episode, organized by the *amīr* himself, was the culmination of a long confrontation, carried out mostly on the fiscal and political fronts, and marked by exchanges of tautly written letters between Samarra and al-Qaṭā’i’ (and, at several points, by displays of force as well). It reached no particular conclusion, ending, in effect, in a stalemate. But it saw Ibn Tūlūn engage the ‘Abbāsid house in a public contest on virtually equal terms.

Reference is to be made as well to a pair of events, also in Ibn Tūlūn’s last years, events that his biographers say threw the *amīr* off his game. Around 265/878, his eldest son, al-‘Abbās ibn Ahmad, led a rebellion against his father.

⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, 3:2079–80 (= Fields, *Abbāsid Recovery*, 123–4).

¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, 3:2083–4 (= Fields, *Abbāsid Recovery*, 126–7). The report in al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rikh*, 2:622 suggests a second event involving Tūlūnid troops in Mecca. Also Hassan, *Tulunides*, 89.

¹¹ Bonner, “Waning,” 322.

¹² On these dates, see Northedge, *Historical Topography*, 240–2.

¹³ On the ruinous years in Samarra, see Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, esp. 75–104 and Kennedy, *Age of the Caliphates*, 156–97.

¹⁴ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 89; 224.

The latter, then on campaign in Syria after having appointed al-‘Abbās to govern Egypt in his stead, responded with a diplomatic overture then force of arms. The revolt, in truth, probably collapsed of its own weight; the sources represent the younger Tūlūnid as violent, unpredictable, and easily swayed by a misguided inner circle.¹⁵ But the event, nonetheless, dealt the *amīr* a sharp blow of both a personal and political kind. Al-‘Abbās was the intended heir and the effort to undercut the revolt proved a serious distraction.¹⁶

More serious still was the betrayal in 268/881–2 by Lu’lu’, Ibn Tūlūn’s freedman and long-time client. For reasons not altogether clear, Lu’lu’ opted to offer his services to Ibn Tūlūn’s great rival, the ‘Abbāsid regent, Abū Ahmad al-Muwaffaq (d. 278/891). The *amīr* had appointed Lu’lu’ as his deputy (*khalifa*) over the region of Diyār Muḍar and assigned him a considerable, multi-ethnic force; a key reference, noted earlier, places the army at the former ‘Abbāsid capital at al-Raqqa, so within reasonable marching distance of Samarra.¹⁷ Lu’lu’, having first contacted al-Muwaffaq by post, led the large force south to Baghdad, where he was embraced by the ‘Abbāsid prince (who promptly sent the Tūlūnid units against the Zanj, then in full revolt in southern Iraq).¹⁸ For Ibn Tūlūn, the defection by Lu’lu’ meant loss of face, a diminution in strength, and an acceleration of the conflict with al-Muwaffaq. The events leading to and including the Damascus Assembly occurred immediately thereafter.

The impact of these developments was no doubt considerable. In each case, Ibn Tūlūn was abandoned by a significant member of his inner circle.¹⁹ But, the biographers tell us, he dealt handily with al-‘Abbās and his clumsy revolt, then, some three years on, countered the betrayal of Lu’lu’ with forceful steps of his own. He appears, in other words, to have retained the ability to pursue his aims, whether in regard to threats from Iraq or otherwise. The question remains of why he chose a moderate and, well, uneven approach, and particularly when goaded by his rival, al-Muwaffaq. The latter can only have been in a state of “agreeable surprise” at this stage, given the decision by Lu’lu’ to defect with such a large force in tow.²⁰

There is a further consideration: had the *amīr* chosen outright confrontation, he would not have acted in isolation. The ‘Abbāsids, roughly at the point

¹⁵ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 244–5, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 67–75.

¹⁶ Bianquis, “Autonomous Egypt,” 96–7, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 72–3.

¹⁷ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 272–3, and al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, 3:2080 (= Fields, 123–4).

¹⁸ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 584–5, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 77–81.

¹⁹ Ibn Tūlūn also had a falling out with his brother, Mūsā ibn Tūlūn. See Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 582.

²⁰ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 585, borrows the phrase from Hassan, *Tulunides*, 81.

of their late third/ninth-century return to Baghdad, faced all manner of countervailing forces. An unhappy set of caliphs, from al-Mutawakkil in 247/861 to al-Mu'tamid, who ascended to the throne in 256/870, had fallen victim in Samarra to internecine violence perpetuated largely by Turkish commanders and their civilian allies.²¹ Outside the capital, a variety of forms of opposition included several “new dynastic enterprises.”²² Among these was the brief but “oddly successful” challenge mounted in Syria by Īsā ibn al-Shaykh al-Shaybānī (d. 269/883).²³ These experiments were attempts at local governance in a variety of provinces, including Khurāsān (Tāhirids), Ifrīqiya (Aghlabids) and Egypt (Tūlūnid), as well as movements with a clearer socio-ideological thrust (the Zanj and the various Ismā‘īli groupings, including the movement from which the Fātimid polity would spring in the Maghrib).²⁴

If the Turkish high command never sought destruction of the caliphate per se, the same cannot be said of two other actors: Ya‘qūb ibn Layth, who led his forces against the ‘Abbāsids only to suffer defeat at Dayr al-Āqūl in 262/876,²⁵ and the Zanj, the defeat of whom consumed enormous imperial muscle and wealth.²⁶ That the Zanj leadership would have extended an offer of cooperation to Ibn Layth – an obscure episode to be sure – suggests one prevailing attitude regarding the viability of the imperial house.²⁷ A variety of opposition movements, in other words, included those willing to face down the ‘Abbāsids, on both military and ideological grounds. The violence committed against the empire by the Saffārids, the Zanj, and, later, the Qarāmiṭa,²⁸ was justified on different grounds in each case; the common goal appears to have been ‘Abbāsid ruin. There is little to indicate that Ibn Tūlūn pursued the same aim, nor has modern scholarship suggested as much. Ibn Tūlūn’s interests were tied too closely to those of the empire for him to see the option as serious. But it is also the case that, at nearly every turn, the *amīr*’s conduct undercut the efficacy of imperial rule, and, as seen already, the ‘Abbāsids themselves – certainly al-Muwaffaq – saw in Ibn Tūlūn a challenge to the integrity of the empire and the authority of the throne. To resolve the puzzle, consideration of

²¹ See Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, 75–104.

²² Bonner, “Waning,” 322.

²³ Canard, “Īsā b. al-Shaykh,” *EI*², and Cobb, *White Banners*, 36–42, from whom I borrow the phrase.

²⁴ Bonner, “Waning,” 325–32.

²⁵ Bonner, “Waning,” 315–18; Bosworth, *Saffarids*, 135–68; and Tor, *Violent Order*, 159–83, who dissents from the view that the Saffārid leader intended to overrun the caliphate.

²⁶ See Bonner, “Waning,” 323–5, and Popovic, *Revolt*.

²⁷ Bosworth, *Saffarids*, 164, and Popovic, *Revolt*, 74.

²⁸ See Madelung, “Karmaṭī,” *EI*².

the resources at Ibn Tūlūn's disposal is in order. These comments will be brief. The main part of the discussion follows: that as much as immediate events shaped the *amīr*'s decision-making, longer-term factors, and two in particular, determined his political and diplomatic choices as well. These provide a richer explanation of Ibn Tūlūn's decision to defer to 'Abbāsid rule.

3

The *amīr* did not pursue political supremacy but one would be forgiven for thinking otherwise. His biographers indicate, first of all, that he took Egypt's public finances firmly in hand. There was precedent for 'Abbāsid governors to fuse civil, military and fiscal powers.²⁹ Typically, however, these were divided, such that public finances were administered by a separate official, normally an appointee from Iraq, whose tenure was understood to be brief, two years on average it seems.³⁰ Ibn Tūlūn was unambiguous in his pursuit of a centralized administration under his sway, and from very early on, which suggests either that he departed Samarra with such a goal in mind or left the capital with that assignment; consideration is given below as to whether the Samarran Turkish command had particular designs on Egypt. Measures included the replacement of the standing *sāhib al-kharāj* – Ahmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Mudabbir (d. c. 271/884), a long-time 'Abbāsid official with close ties to the Iraqi center³¹ – with more pliable officials followed by the assumption of full decision-making authority over the collection and dispersal of Egypt's revenue.

Ibn Tūlūn confronted Ibn al-Mudabbir directly. Some four years in, around 257/870–1, and despite the support of his Iraqi allies, a harried Ibn al-Mudabbir finally sought transfer to Syria.³² Ibn Tūlūn, for reasons that are less than clear, though personal vendetta no doubt played a part, continued to pursue Ibn al-Mudabbir despite the latter's reappointment.³³ Ibn Tūlūn then won control over the fiscal administration proper, having convinced al-Mu'tamid of its necessity.³⁴ The appointment, in or around 258/871–2,³⁵ appears to have

²⁹ On the "reign" of al-Sarī ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 205/820), see Dunn, "Struggle," 49–70.

³⁰ See Dunn, 109–15, and, for the wider political context, Kennedy, "Egypt as a Province," 76–85.

³¹ See Gottschalk, "Ibn al-Mudabbir," *EI*².

³² Hassan, *Tulunides*, 50.

³³ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 3:53, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 71–2.

³⁴ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 72–3, and al-Kindī, *Governors*, 217. Also see Bonner, "Ibn Tūlūn's Jihad," 582–3.

³⁵ Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt," 92, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 50–1.

been hedged; the caliph proceeded with the appointment but also dispatched a high-level client named either Nasīm³⁶ or Nafīs³⁷ – the name would indicate a freedman – along with several high ranking jurists. These persons were charged, it seems, with confirmation of the appointment and some manner of oversight.³⁸ Al-Balawī adds that Ibn Tūlūn retained the individual³⁹ appointed previously by the caliphate to the *dīwān al-kharāj*; the *Sīra* indicates that the official in question now took his orders directly from the *amīr*.

The Arabic sources point to success on Ibn Tūlūn's part in managing the Egyptian economy. Scholars typically cite Ibn al-Dāya's comment that the *amīr* bequeathed a surplus to Khumārawayh of some 10,000,000 dinars.⁴⁰ Similar references include that of Ibn Taghrī Birdī (d. 874/1470), a later Egyptian author, who has the Tūlūnid treasury bring in one million dinars of revenue over expenditures per annum, and that of al-Maqrīzī to the effect that, because of his careful fiscal stewardship, Ibn Tūlūn increased savings from agrarian production (*kharāj*) from 800,000 to well over four million dinars.⁴¹ If, as seems likely, these sums are exaggerated – they no doubt worked to further the image of Ibn Tūlūn as an effective manager – this does not undercut the conclusion that his policies brought new prosperity to the Egyptian economy. In addition to data provided by papyrus documents – that point to an active local economy, including traffic in slaves, itself a feature of considerable transregional commerce linking Egypt to various regions – other indications evince strong economic performance.⁴² Surviving cloth remnants point to a rise in textile

³⁶ Ibn Sa‘id, *Mughrib*, 84.

³⁷ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 72–3.

³⁸ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 73; Ibn Sa‘id, *Mughrib*, 84; and al-Kindī, *Governors*, 217. Questions surrounding the appointment are prompted in part by a set of dinars that date to 258/871–2, that is, the same year as the appointment itself. Roughly half of the coins bear the name “Nīhrīr.” Al-Balawī, 79–80, identifies this individual as al-Mutawakkil’s former *khādīm* (eunuch?) but, more to the point, a spy sent by al-Muwaffaq to Tūlūnid Egypt under guise of an official appointment. I owe the information on these coins to Michael Bates. I take up these questions in a separate writing, which is in preparation.

³⁹ See Ibn Sa‘id, *Mughrib*, 84, n. 3, and al-Kindī, *Governors*, 217, n. 2. His full name appears to have been Abū Ayyūb Alḥamad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ukht Abī al-Wazīr.

⁴⁰ Ibn Sa‘id, *Mughrib*, 132, and Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 3:26. For one comment on this reference, see Ehrenkreutz, “Numismato-Statistical Reflections,” 277.

⁴¹ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 3:27 and al-Maqrīzī, *Khitāt*, 1:266–7.

⁴² On the value of the documentary (papyrus) evidence, see Frantz-Murphy, “Land-Tenure,” 239, and “New Interpretation,” 274, 296, and, more recently, Sijpesteijn, “Profit,” 91. On the papyrus sector in the pre-Tūlūnid period, see Malczycki, “Papyrus Industry.”

production and, in particular, *tirāz*.⁴³ Numismatic evidence exists as well: the quality of Tūlūnid dinars speaks to the ready availability of gold and the ability of the Tūlūnid administration to employ those who could fashion it in style.⁴⁴ Passing references offer supporting evidence: al-Muwaffaq's preoccupation with Egypt's wealth (to fund the Zanj campaign) and al-'Abbās's coercion of huge sums from Egyptian merchants (to sustain his rebellion).⁴⁵

Despite consensus in modern scholarship regarding Tūlūnid economic activity, questions surround the *amīr*'s fiscal policies. Much of what struck medieval observers as a turn to greater wealth, of course, had to do with Ibn Tūlūn's ability to more strictly control the flow of revenue from Egypt.⁴⁶ Much turns, as well, on whether Ibn Tūlūn is to be credited with outright reforms and the extent to which these related to practices of earlier officials, including Ibn al-Mudabbir.⁴⁷ Frantz-Murphy argues for a substantial new role under the Tūlūnids for elite landholders and state officials. Their ability to exploit, on the one hand, the lands of Egypt (particularly for textile production), and, on the other, the mix of profits from (their own) holdings with the usufruct of state lands (which they effectively controlled), contributed to the flourishing of pre-Fātīmid Egypt.⁴⁸ This is material for another discussion; suffice it here to know that Ibn Tūlūn had the wherewithal to pursue a sweeping political agenda.

His achievements can be listed again: the creation of a new army and navy;⁴⁹ the construction of al-Qaṭā'i'; the specific construction of the new congregational mosque that, again, remains in situ today, and a new hospital complex (*bīmāristān*) that, unfortunately, does not, but which appears to have been a prominent feature of the Tūlūnid landscape;⁵⁰ and the fashioning of an extensive network of high-level alliances, in Egypt, Iraq and Syria.⁵¹ There is strong

43 Examples of Tulun-era textiles in the Metropolitan Museum of Art can be viewed online at www.metmuseum.org. The question remains open regarding the relative contribution of textile production and trade to the new Tūlūnid economy. See Frantz-Murphy, "New Interpretation."

44 Ehrenkreutz, "Studies," 149–50.

45 Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 248–9, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 68–9.

46 Hassan, *Tulunides*, 235, is careful to make this point.

47 See Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt," 92, 98, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 243–7.

48 Frantz-Murphy, "New Interpretation."

49 On the Tūlūnid navy, see Hassan, *Tulunides*, 173–5, and Kāshif, *Aḥmad ibn Tūlūn*, 137–41.

50 Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 180, 350, and al-Maqrīzī, *Khitāṭ*, 4/2:691–2, and *passim*. Also see Dols, "Islamic Hospital," 388–9, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 297.

51 The best starting point is Hassan, *Tulunides*. Frantz-Murphy, "New Interpretation," and Sijpesteijn, "Profit," point to the value of the documentary record in mapping Ibn Tūlūn's networks in Egypt and across the caliphate.

evidence, some of which is considered below, that he sustained support from nearly all spheres of elite Egyptian society – military, political, commercial and religious. This activity, in the case of the military and bureaucratic circles to which he offered a variety of inducements, had obvious utility, that is, the operation of the new regime. But, like other measures, it also served to promote a new regional profile. Ibn Tūlūn's activity, in this sense, alongside his conflict with the imperial center, points to an emergent, post-imperial order.

The individual features of the new Tūlūnid polity deserve greater consideration than can be given them here. Regarding the construction of al-Qaṭā'i' as a source of new wealth, for example, there is reason to develop Kennedy's characterization of Baghdad and Samarra – each in its time, like al-Qaṭā'i', an administrative and military center – as large-scale projects in landed and commercial speculation.⁵² Al-Qaṭā'i' provided investment opportunities and other sources of wealth for his entourage, top officers and Egypt's merchant leadership. The new foundation also served Ibn Tūlūn's political aims in providing, on the one hand, accommodation for newly recruited regiments and, on the other, a new ceremonial venue for himself and his regime. He appears to have pursued the latter goal through monumental building and the creation of what may have been a new ceremonial calendar.⁵³

Much turned, of course, on the creation of an effective fighting force.⁵⁴ Tūlūnid military history is difficult to reconstruct; little documentary evidence remains and the written sources seem mostly disinterested in Tūlūnid military affairs per se. In addition, what data does exist can be misleading; numbers (of, say, troops) seem often unreliable. That said, there is much to indicate that Ibn Tūlūn created a substantial military. We might refer again to al-Ṭabarī's reference: "Lu'lū' was stationed in al-Raqqah with an enormous army consisting of men from Farghānah, Turks, troops from Bilād al-Rūm, Berbers, blacks and others, all the choicest troops of Ibn Tūlūn."⁵⁵ The Egyptian sources, for their part, offer valuable summary comments, such as al-Balawī's assessment of the force that Ibn Tūlūn led into Ṭarsūs on his first campaign.⁵⁶ Ibn al-Dāya describes the resources left by Ibn Tūlūn on his death in 270/884 – troops, live-stock, and ships – and major projects on his part, including a fortress on the island of Giza. He also refers to a register (*jarīda*) containing the names of 7,000

52 Kennedy, *Age of the Caliphates*, 163–4, and Kennedy, *Early Abbasid Caliphate*, 86.

53 See Gordon, "Legacy of Samarra."

54 Frantz, "Saving and Investment," 64–5, takes a dim view of the Tūlūnid military.

55 Fields, *Abbasid Recovery*, 124 (= al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 3:2080).

56 Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 97.

mawālī and 24,000 *ghilmān*.⁵⁷ Al-Kindī, for his part, quotes claims of a force of 100,000 troops sent by Ibn Tūlūn against his son, al-Abbās; other sources use a similar number in other contexts.⁵⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, perhaps relying on al-Balawī,⁵⁹ refers to Ibn Tūlūn's army as made up of "foreigners" (*'ajam*) and "freedmen" (*mawālī*): "the numbers of slaves (*'abīd*) became excessive; their numbers exceeded 24,000 Turkish *ghilmān*, 40,000 blacks and seven thousand salaried free soldiers (*hurr murtazaq*)."⁶⁰

There is, unfortunately, little direct information on the forces that accompanied Ibn Tūlūn upon his initial appointment. Al-Balawī does say that the *amīr* was assigned a force from the imperial army (*jaysh*) but offers no details.⁶¹ The *amīr* would go on to recruit new regiments (see below), but the assumption must be that, early on, he availed himself of extant forces, probably mounted fighters, and presumably made up of some combination of units that arrived with him in Egypt and those already on the ground, even drawn perhaps from what remained of the Egyptian Arab *jund*.⁶² The evidence is circumstantial: Ibn Tūlūn would suppress several large-scale revolts, both in the Delta and Upper Egypt; that he did so at a very early point implies, of course, the availability of suitable forces. Around 256/870, for example, one Ibn al-Šūfī, head of an 'Alīd grouping, routed a Tūlūnid force; Ibn Tūlūn was able to send fresh units to replace it.⁶³

It is only later – several years following his entry into al-Fustāṭ – that he took steps to expand his armies. Events surrounding the activity of the aforementioned Īsā ibn al-Shaykh provided the context. In 256/870, the nettlesome Syrian governor withheld the *bay'a* to the newly seated al-Mu'tamid; he then seized a substantial shipment of tribute bound from Egypt to Iraq. The caliph, directing Ibn Tūlūn to deal with Ibn al-Shaykh, authorized him to recruit new forces. The *amīr* is reported to have acquired substantial numbers of new infan-

57 Ibn Sa'īd, *Mughrib*, 132. The sense in this context of both terms, *mawlā* and *ghulām*, deserves further discussion. Both terms probably refer to some manner of clientage and/or slavery. For comments on "the *ghulām* system," in precisely this period, see Kennedy, *Age of the Caliphates*, 204–8. Elsewhere, Kennedy, *Armies*, 156–9, treats the "outline budget," dating to the reign of al-Mu'tadid, that contains references to a similarly complex military body (including *ghilmān* and *mawālī*).

58 Al-Kindī, *Governors*, 223. See Kāshif, *Aḥmad ibn Tūlūn*, 127.

59 On the use of al-Balawī's text by later authors, including al-Maqrīzī, see Bonner, "Ibn Tūlūn's Jihad," 579.

60 Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭāṭ*, 1:253. The passage, clearly ambiguous, deserves closer discussion.

61 Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 42.

62 On the traditional *jund*, see Kennedy, "Egypt as a Province," esp. 80–1.

63 Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt," 93.

try units of “the red and black” (Ibn al-Dāya) or “slaves, Byzantines (*Rūm*), and Africans (*sūdān*)” (al-Balawī).⁶⁴ Only a short while later, Ibn Tūlūn initiated the first of the two campaigns into Palestine, Syria and the frontier districts.⁶⁵

4

The difficulty of coming to terms with Ibn Tūlūn’s reign is, in part, a function of the relative dearth of modern Tūlūnid scholarship.⁶⁶ Zaky M. Hassan’s *Les Tulunides* (1933) remains essential reading, despite a discursive style and uneven approach to the sources.⁶⁷ More recent work includes unpublished doctoral theses by Gladys Frantz (1978) and Ernest Randa (1990); the first of the two studies treats the history of the Tūlūnid economy, the second the politics of the Tūlūnid state.⁶⁸ Published studies include Thierry Bianquis’s chapter in *The Cambridge History of Egypt* (1998) and Michael Bonner’s valuable “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad” (2010).⁶⁹ The merits of these writings notwithstanding, they largely gloss over the question considered here. In light of an apparent disagreement over Ibn Tūlūn’s rule, the near absence of debate is striking.⁷⁰ Hassan’s rejoinder to Della Vida is typical: he insists on Ibn Tūlūn’s success in creating an independent dynasty, brushing aside the Italian scholar’s comment that the *amīr*’s effort fell short of the mark, but does little to follow up.⁷¹

Hassan repeatedly speaks of Ibn Tūlūn as “prudent,” by which he seems to mean a mix of discretion and sagacity.⁷² Hassan’s instincts are correct (on this as on many topics); it remains, however, to explain that very posture on the

⁶⁴ Ibn Sa‘id, *Mughrīb*, 80, and al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 51. Qa‘dān ibn ‘Amr, an obscure Tūlūnid poet, refers in one verse to the “white” and “black” of Ibn Tūlūn’s forces. See Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 594.

⁶⁵ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 582–4, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 64–7.

⁶⁶ Frantz, “Saving and Investment,” 25–30, is a discussion of older literature.

⁶⁷ Hassan did not have access to al-Balawī’s *Sīra*, the sole edition of which only appeared in 1939.

⁶⁸ Frantz-Murphy, an authority on Egypt’s medieval economy, has published much of the material of the thesis elsewhere. See, for example, “Land-Tenure” and “New Interpretation.”

⁶⁹ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 594–6, treats Tūlūnid-era verse that is preserved in al-Kindī’s *Governors*, translating two of the poems in the process. Also see Guest’s introduction (al-Kindī, *Governors*, 39–42) and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 266–78, which includes French translation of snippets of the poems.

⁷⁰ See Bonner, “Jihad,” 601, citing Becker, *Beiträge*, 2:177, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 85.

⁷¹ Hassan, *Tulunides*, 97.

⁷² Hassan, *Tulunides*, 33, 49, 57, 62, 85, and 105.

amīr's part. Bonner, in his new study, moves matters forward considerably. His argument is mostly new: Ibn Ṭūlūn pursued his political project by drawing on support from the *Thughūr*, an ideological program that turned on an appeal to *jihād*. The implication seems to be that had he won sufficient support in this regard, Ibn Ṭūlūn would have felt prepared to pursue a wider imperial agenda. There is much to Bonner's approach, although it raises certain questions that I consider below. The aim is to gain a fuller sense of Ibn Ṭūlūn as an imperial actor, and, in particular, explain the mix of ambition and restraint. A pair of factors loomed particularly large.

5

There was, first of all, the question of legitimization. Ibn Ṭūlūn's tenure constituted an exercise in political experimentation: he was viewed, certainly at the 'Abbāsid center, as an upstart with little proper claim to high office.⁷³ This is not to disregard his initial appointment as governor, which granted him the requisite standing and appropriate fiscal and military resources. At issue, rather, was his subsequent bid for an empire-wide role. To justify it, he had to overcome an obvious deficit of political capital. It required the *amīr*, in part, to come to terms with his background; he had to engage in considerable self-fashioning. He had arrived in Egypt at a relatively young age (33), that is, if one considers Egypt's geopolitical centrality and thus the weight of the appointment. It seems, as well, that he could boast of little prior administrative or field experience (although, in fact, the sources say little on this score). The biographers seem mostly concerned, however, with two other features of his background: his ethnic origins and his affiliation with the Islamic tradition. Ibn al-Dāya and al-Balawī treat the two features nearly as one.⁷⁴

The relevant passages relate, specifically, to the *amīr's* membership in the Samarran Turkish military; his father, Ṭūlūn, was of likely Uyghur origin, captured by a governor of Bukhara and delivered by him as tribute to al-Ma'mūn, probably in 200/815–6.⁷⁵ The sources are careful to point this out. Although

73 Bonner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad," 573, observes that this was a period "conducive to political creativity."

74 Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 34–5, and Ibn Sa'īd, *Mughrib*, 73–4. The texts share a common aim of distinguishing Ibn Ṭūlūn from the other Turks but part ways on other counts. The long discussion in Randa, "Tulunid Dynasty," 37–71, offers valuable insights but is otherwise uneven, the translation of key passages unreliable.

75 See Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, 20, 22.

the sources do not say so directly, the presumption is that Ṭūlūn was recruited to the third/ninth-century ‘Abbāsid slave military, a force whose members are typically identified as “Turks.”⁷⁶ The biographers indicate that his son, Aḥmad, followed in his father’s steps, and was thus among a number of second generation Samarran Turks to enter imperial military service.⁷⁷ Both texts, and that of Ibn al-Dāya in particular,⁷⁸ seem intent on making an additional point regarding the young officer’s relations with his fellow Turks. Through dint of service to the state (*sultān*), seriousness of purpose, and proper religious (read: Islamic) training, Ibn Ṭūlūn gained the abiding respect of his colleagues. These same qualities led him, however, not only to opt for an extended sojourn among the ascetic warriors and scholars of the frontier region, from whom he acquired further learning,⁷⁹ but to distance himself from his Turkish peers. The texts have him grow weary of their rough-hewn ways and their “disregard for religious norms.” Out of frustration, finally, he sought formal transfer from Samarra to the *Thughūr*, where he pursued his relations with “the people of faith and godliness” with new energy.⁸⁰

Randa considers the passages in useful fashion. He argues for a specific ideological intent: the assignment of proper virtues to the *amīr* himself, that is, virtues to which the impious Turks could not lay claim, and, on a broader level, the promotion of regional polities in contradistinction to the unitary imperial state.⁸¹ While a plausible reading, Randa neglects a wider discourse of third/ninth- and fourth/tenth-century Near Eastern letters regarding the presence

⁷⁶ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 32–4. The sources say little of Ṭūlūn’s military service; Kāshif’s comment (*Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn*, 17) that he commanded the caliphal guard is guesswork. The term “Turk” (Ar., *turk*, pl. *atrāk*), used by the Arabic sources and modern scholarship alike, conflates a likely mix of regional and ethnic identities on the part of these men. On the history of the Samarran Turkish forces, see Gordon, *Thousands Swords*, and Kennedy, *Age of the Caliphates*, 156–73. Neither of these writings treats the problem head on. Bosworth, “Turkish Personal Names,” 98–9, treats it in reference to the Seljuq military.

⁷⁷ Gordon, *Thousands Swords*, 69–70, and *passim*.

⁷⁸ Ibn al-Dāya, at least in the extant version of his text, is far more blunt than al-Balawī in describing Ibn Ṭūlūn’s reaction to the “Turks.” See Ibn Sa’id, *Mughrib*, 74.

⁷⁹ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 34–6, and Ibn Sa’id, *Mughrib*, 74. Both texts refer explicitly to Ibn Ṭūlūn’s close relations with the *muhaddithūn* (“traditionists”). Tempting as it is to suggest, on these grounds, the *amīr*’s connection with sectarian/doctrinal disputes of the third/ninth century – that is, the emergence of the “Hadith Party”/*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* – the sources provide few other indications of this kind. On the movement itself, see Crone, *Political Thought*, 125–6, and Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, 54. That young Aḥmad studied *hadīth* seems altogether plausible.

⁸⁰ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 35, and see Bonner, “Ibn Ṭūlūn’s Jihad,” 581, 604–5.

⁸¹ Randa, “Tulunid Dynasty,” 37–71, esp. 67–71.

and conduct of the “Turks.”⁸² The same attitude that colors the Ṭūlūnid texts appears in writings by contemporary observers based in Iraq, including al-Jāhīz and al-Ṭabarī.⁸³ This is to suggest, in other words, that a Samarran politics accompanied the “Turkish” military men upon their assumption of provincial posts, particularly in Syria and Egypt, and their subsequent immersion in local politics.⁸⁴ As in Syria, Turks and other ‘ajam, another wide-ranging term by which the soldiers were known, dominated Egyptian regional administration for much of the later third/ninth century. Al-Balawī’s list of the pre-Ṭūlūnid governors of al-Fustāṭ speaks to this history.⁸⁵ One wishes for more evidence regarding local reaction to the governance of these men. The passages in the Ṭūlūnid biographies, in any case, bespeak an attitude made up in good part of barely contained disdain.

To justify a claim to preeminence, Ibn Ṭūlūn turned to various sources of legitimization. He did so against a backdrop of Egypt’s gradual Islamization; Ibn Ṭūlūn had perforce to make an appeal to an emergent, increasingly complex Muslim population.⁸⁶ References to these gestures are to be read with care given the lengths to which the biographers go in representing the *amīr* as a righteous if tough-minded figure.⁸⁷ But there is much to suggest that Ibn Ṭūlūn indeed relied on public displays of piety and faith.⁸⁸ The great mosque was the most visible gesture of this kind; Ibn Ṭūlūn is reported to have built it in response to complaints that the older *masjid* in al-Fustāṭ had grown overcrowded.⁸⁹ In this sense, the mosque met public demand; the evidence that it met a wider political agenda is suggested by the building’s inaugural inscription. Hung in full view, it joined the *amīr*’s name and titles to appropriate Qur’ānic passages that speak to earthly and divine reward for righteous

⁸² Discussion of the historiographical questions that surround the early Ṭūlūnid biographies falls outside the purview of this essay. See Bonner, “Ibn Ṭūlūn’s Jihad,” 578–80.

⁸³ See Gordon, “Samarran Turkish Community,” and Haarmann, “Ideology and History.”

⁸⁴ On Syria, see Cobb, *White Banners*, 41 and *passim*.

⁸⁵ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 33. The key source in this regard is al-Kindī, *Governors*. See Dunn, “Struggle,” 136–8, and Kennedy, “Egypt as a Province,” 85.

⁸⁶ The conversion to Islam of much of Egypt’s populace is a complex topic in its own right. See Décobert, “Sur l’Arabisation,” and Iskander, “Islamization,” 219–20.

⁸⁷ See Bonner, “Ibn Ṭūlūn’s Jihad,” 578, and Randa, “Tulunid Dynasty,” 67–71.

⁸⁸ On the *amīr*’s demonstrations of faith, see Hassan, *Tulunides*, 99–100, who strikes a rare cynical note.

⁸⁹ For references, see Swelim, “Mosque,” 91–2. The sources record a series of popular complaints that erupted upon the mosque’s completion; while none seem overtly political as such, they might be read as raising questions of Ibn Ṭūlūn’s leadership. See, for example, al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭat*, 4/1: 70–4.

deeds, notably the raising of “houses of God” (Q 24:36–7).⁹⁰ Contemporary observers were struck, as well, by the building’s grandeur and its use in what might be called extra-ritual ceremony.⁹¹ Ibn Tūlūn also put the mosque and al-Qaṭā’i’s central plaza (*maydān*) to use for equally visible demonstrations of social welfare (eg., feeding of the poor). Al-Maqrīzī makes much of these events: the occasions in which Ibn Tūlūn extended charity to all manner of folk were regular, the foodstuffs plentiful, the crowds considerable.⁹² Elsewhere he refers to Ibn Tūlūn’s employment of a staff of Qur’ānic reciters.⁹³ The hunt to win over faith-based opinion, popular and otherwise, can be joined to steps taken to secure relations with the Coptic leadership.⁹⁴

It was in turning to two other sources of legitimization, however, that Ibn Tūlūn strayed into rough water. These were, first, his relations with the Sunni religious establishment and, second, his ties to the *Thughūr*. It seems evident that serious problems arose on both counts. Ibn Tūlūn’s ambitions were blunted as a result.

His approach to the religious establishment, that is, senior Muslim jurists and scholars, involved different steps. The presumption is that he sought, by extension, to reach the broader social strata that looked to the scholars for direction. The *amīr* turned consistently, for example, to public expressions of religious sanction, particularly for controversial measures. The references lend themselves to the image of the dutiful prince; the frequency of their occurrence, however, suggests a pattern of real activity. Ibn Tūlūn assembled official witnesses to confirm his formal transfer of tribute to a Syrian governor, probably in 262/875–6, and, at a later point, he sent a delegation of religious notables to al-‘Abbās in an effort to negotiate an end to the latter’s rebellion.⁹⁵ One can cite further examples. The *amīr* may have been constitutionally bound, so to speak, to garner declarations of this kind; it seems to be the case, nonetheless, that he consistently sought out public sanction to further his political aims.

The Assembly in Damascus was a crowning occasion in this sense: Ibn Tūlūn, the presiding figure, summoned scholars, jurists and notables (*ashrāf*)

⁹⁰ See Swelim, “Mosque,” 189–97. For translations (English and French), see Corbet, “Life and Works,” 557–62, and Fattal, *Ibn Tulun’s Mosque*, 19–22.

⁹¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khitāt*, 4:1:59–64, 80.

⁹² Ibid., 2:87–8; and see al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 54–6.

⁹³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khitāt*, 2:90, and see Bianquis, “Autonomous Egypt,” 99. Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 3:59, has Ibn Tūlūn appoint Qur’ān reciters to read at Mu‘āwiya’s tomb in Damascus.

⁹⁴ Hassan, *Tulunides*, 216–19, and Swanson, *Coptic Papacy*, 44–5.

⁹⁵ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 249–52, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 69–70.

from Egypt, Syria and other regions to voice their support for his defense of the caliphate and sharp attack on the ‘Abbāsid regent, al-Muwaffaq.⁹⁶ Bonner sums up the main points: “Ibn Ṭūlūn urged the participants to endorse a document in which he declared jihad against al-Muwaffaq and called for his removal from the office of heir apparent or *walī l-‘ahd*.⁹⁷ The meeting, remarkable in its own right, bespeaks the unpredictable character of late third/ninth-century politics, not to speak of the troubled state of the ‘Abbāsid house. The Assembly was precipitated by one of the more curious turns in Ibn Ṭūlūn’s career, an effort to spirit the caliph, al-Mu’tamid, off to Egypt. The plot, aborted as it turned out, is understood as an attempt to “install [the ‘Abbāsid dynasty] on the shores of the Nile.”⁹⁸ Al-Muwaffaq’s man in Mosul, Ishāq ibn Kundaj, brought the effort up short; he effectively arrested the caliph then escorted him back to the capital.⁹⁹ A furious Ibn Ṭūlūn reacted by organizing the Assembly at which he issued his denunciation of the ‘Abbāsid regent.

Several features of the Assembly stand out. Of particular interest is Ibn Ṭūlūn’s falling out with the venerable *qādī* of al-Fuṣṭāṭ, Bakkār ibn Qutayba (d. 270/884) and at least two of the latter’s Egyptian colleagues. The reasons for the quarrel are vague; it appears that Bakkār offered only guarded support of Ibn Ṭūlūn’s denunciation of al-Muwaffaq. The crisis culminated in Bakkār’s imprisonment.¹⁰⁰ One later Egyptian source has the *amīr* humiliate the judge in public: Bakkār was led lightly clad atop a pack animal, this despite the *qādī*’s advanced age and reputation.¹⁰¹ But the sources also indicate that Ibn Ṭūlūn did seek a compromise, only to face the older man’s obduracy. The turn in mood may have been just that, in other words, an unfortunate conclusion to an otherwise nuanced relationship.¹⁰² Ibn Ṭūlūn, after all, had included Bakkār in the delegation sent to al-‘Abbās and it had been on Ibn Ṭūlūn’s invitation that the *qādī* took part in the Damascus meeting.

Ibn Ṭūlūn turned on a prominent scholar on at least one other occasion. This was Yūsuf ibn Ibrāhīm, the father of Ibn al-Dāya, the earliest of Ibn Ṭūlūn’s

⁹⁶ A point that Bonner does not consider is that Ibn Ṭūlūn may have had particular reason to use the great Umayyad mosque; the venue for the Assembly was not accidental.

⁹⁷ Bonner, “Ibn Ṭūlūn’s Jihad,” 587.

⁹⁸ Bianquis, “Autonomous Egypt,” 101.

⁹⁹ See, for a brief description, Kennedy, “al-Mu’tamid ‘Alā ’llāh,” *EI*².

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed account, see Bonner, “Ibn Ṭūlūn’s Jihad,” 592–3, 598–9, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 87–8.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf‘ al-iṣr*, 512–13, and see Hassan, *Tulunides*, 260–5.

¹⁰² See Ibn Ḥajar, 505–14, for *akhbār* on encounters between the two men.

biographers.¹⁰³ Both episodes, and particularly that concerning Bakkār, stand as evidence that Ibn Tūlūn, in his executive capacity, could not always hope to avoid alienating elite opinion. The two episodes might also be related, on a broader level, to the emergence of an ever-confident religious leadership, that of Ismā‘īlī and other Shī‘ite movements to be sure, but also proto-Sunnī urban communities, particularly in Iraq. These episodes played out against a backdrop of delicate relations between the emergent religious circles and secular political forces (local governors, regional pretenders, and bureaucratic elements at court).¹⁰⁴ Ibn Tūlūn’s occasionally fraught relationship with Egyptian scholars, in other words, makes sense in this wider context. From the *amīr*’s perspective, a significant source of legitimization was thus never assured.

Ibn Tūlūn also stumbled in seeking to exploit his long-time association with the *Thughūr*. Bonner is certainly correct on this score.¹⁰⁵ The effort involved, it seems, winning support from the residents of the *Thughūr* and projecting a lasting association with the practice and ethos of *jihād*.¹⁰⁶ It was a matter of drawing upon the *amīr*’s early experiences on the frontier and of sustaining these contacts once in office. It was a matter, in other words, of relating Ibn Tūlūn’s background to his political fortunes; the sources cite his education on the frontier as a turning point.¹⁰⁷ Bonner, citing Tor and others, points out that the gesture of eliciting support from the frontier folk, and donning the mantle of “holy war,” had parallels in the activity of, among others, Ibn al-Layth and the Aghlabid house in the Maghrib.¹⁰⁸

Bonner deals at length with Ibn Tūlūn’s activity on the frontier; he sees each of the occasions in which the *amīr* appeared in Ṭarsūs as the endgame of

¹⁰³ See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-udabā'*, 2:558–9, and Rosenthal, “Ibn al-Dāya,” *EI*². The former text describes Ibn Tūlūn in the company of a group of scholar-notables when Yūsuf’s supporters show up to plead his case.

¹⁰⁴ On this complex question, see the different views of Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 62ff., 69ff., 72ff., and Zaman, *Religion and Politics*. An anecdote in al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 159, seems to play with this dynamic: a *khaṭīb* forgets to mention the *amīr* at the end of his sermon, an act normally interpreted, of course, as insubordination if not a call for outright revolt. The man catches himself and utters the required phrase, thus deflecting the wrath of an alert Ibn Tūlūn.

¹⁰⁵ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 575, 584, 586, 601.

¹⁰⁶ It is worth asking how a claim to the frontier took shape: was it a matter of exercising authority over the region? Was it a matter of sustaining elite networks and contacts in Ṭarsūs and its hinterland? Was it a matter of actually leading forces against Byzantium? (There are no indications that Ibn Tūlūn ever rode against Byzantine forces in person).

¹⁰⁷ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 34–5, 98–9.

¹⁰⁸ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 605.

his campaigns in Syria. The two campaigns can be briefly described. Around 262/875–6,¹⁰⁹ al-Mu'tamid appointed Ibn Ṭūlūn over the *Thughūr*, despite al-Muwaffaq's opposition.¹¹⁰ Only two years later – the delay needs explanation – did Ibn Ṭūlūn proceed north into Syria, investing a series of towns including Antioch, the only site to offer resistance. He then pushed on to the *Thughūr* itself, settling in Ṭarsūs, sometime around 265–6/878–80. He soon faced opposition from the local populace, angry over the presence of the Ṭūlūnid forces and its impact on food prices. He responded by withdrawing from the city without a fight. Al-Balawī has Ibn Ṭūlūn's officers resist the decision; devising an excuse, he explained that by appearing to capitulate to the city's demands, he could demonstrate to the Byzantines that Ṭarsūs was no easy target.¹¹¹ It was at this point that he returned to Egypt to deal with al-'Abbās. He departed the frontier, in sum, without having secured a lasting presence and, thus, access to its ideological manna.¹¹²

The betrayal by Lu'lū' in 268/882 precipitated the second campaign. Learning of the betrayal (and of the benefit to al-Muwaffaq), Ibn Ṭūlūn again marched from Egypt. While the events that followed are difficult to piece together, they included the foiled plan to engineer al-Mu'tamid's escape from Iraq, and the grand meeting in the Syrian capital. The Damascus Assembly, as seen already, was largely an exercise in frustration; al-Muwaffaq used it as fodder for a new (political) assault on Ibn Ṭūlūn. It was probably at this juncture – the winter of 269/883 – that the *amīr* continued on to the frontier. Confronting resistance once again from Ṭarsūs (although ostensibly for different reasons), Ibn Ṭūlūn laid siege to the city but was soon forced to withdraw in humiliation following a deliberate flooding of his camp. He fell ill shortly thereafter, dying months later in Egypt.¹¹³

Each of the two occasions, then, saw Ibn Ṭūlūn fail to extend his authority over the *Thughūr*; each was a setback on both political and ideological grounds. Developments on the frontier thus proved corrosive: much like his falling out with Bakkār, the twin setbacks undercut the *amīr*'s claims to leadership. On this point, there is little reason for argument. Ibn Ṭūlūn's gamble with regard to the frontier was no surprise; again, the period was rife with local efforts to frame alternatives to 'Abbāsid rule. But Bonner puts it this way: "a viable, vigorous dynastic state operating on the fringes of the crisis-ridden 'Abbāsid caliph-

¹⁰⁹ See Bonner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad," 583, 584 (citing Ibn al-'Adim's *Bughyat al-ṭalab*).

¹¹⁰ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 73, and see Bonner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad," 583.

¹¹¹ See Bonner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad," 584.

¹¹² Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 97–101.

¹¹³ Bonner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad," 574–5.

ate had *no choice* but to be, very literally, an enterprise of frontier and jihad” [emphasis mine].¹¹⁴

That Ibn Tūlūn made an effort to associate himself with the frontier is not in question; a good measure of his political life was tied to activity in and around Ṭarsūs. But what of this question of choice? The early biographies – the key repository of evidence – indicate that Ibn Tūlūn left few stones unturned in the effort to secure legitimization. They indicate that he went to great lengths within Egypt itself, thus, in effect, far from the northern frontier, to join his political and economic activity to a variety of locally meaningful public gestures, all intended, of course, to burnish his standing in the province itself. The raising of the grand mosque, the staging of pious rituals, and sundry other activities in and around al-Qaṭā’ī: such actions are to be understood in these terms. This is to take issue, then, with the view that an association with the frontier constituted Ibn Tūlūn’s sole and even principal legitimating source.

Thus a further look at the Damascus Assembly is in order. Bonner has Ibn Tūlūn’s call for *jihād* – his response to al-Muwaffaq’s aggressive measures, including his treatment of al-Mu’tamid – as “the very heart of the matter.”¹¹⁵ But the significance of the meeting may have lain elsewhere. For one thing, in appealing for sanction from an elite gathering, Ibn Tūlūn was adhering to a pattern to which he had turned many times before, if now on a grander scale, and usually without reference to *jihād*. It is also clear, as Bonner himself points out, that Ibn Tūlūn organized the meeting at a delicate juncture; he had suffered the defection of Lu’lu’ and the embarrassment at Ṭarsūs. Given that al-Muwaffaq had gained political ground in the process, this following recent successes against the Zanj and the humiliation of al-Mu’tamid, it seems likely that Ibn Tūlūn was seeking to regain lost ground against his chief antagonist.¹¹⁶ The meeting in Damascus offered this opportunity. The most telling evidence, however, occurs in the document drawn up in conjunction with the Assembly. Al-Balawī refers to it as the “the document of deposition” (*kitāb al-khal’*). It certainly contains a call for *jihād* (against al-Muwaffaq), but its larger purpose was to marshal support for the caliph, effectively under house arrest in Iraq.¹¹⁷ The document deals at length with al-Muwaffaq on this score, aiming much

¹¹⁴ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 573, 605, and see Tor, *Violent Order*, esp. 11–84, on the early ‘Abbāsid phase of the frontier movement. Also see Bonner’s earlier, full-length discussion in *Aristocratic Violence*.

¹¹⁵ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 588. Bonner is very clear that it constituted only one of several key demands. My argument turns on a question of emphasis.

¹¹⁶ Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 585, and see Kennedy, “al-Mu’tamid ‘Alā ’llāh,” *EI*².

¹¹⁷ A point made clear by Bonner, “Ibn Tūlūn’s Jihad,” 593–7.

of its ire at him for his treatment of al-Mu'tamid, and calling for the various measures to be taken against the regent.

But, if the Damascus Assembly had a wider aim still, it was to provide Ibn Tūlūn with what turned out to be a final opportunity – he would be dead within less than a year – to lay claim to preeminence. The measures to be taken against al-Muwaffaq, including *jihād*, were thus of secondary weight. As it turned out, events on the frontier and the subsequent clash with Bakkār overshadowed whatever benefits Ibn Tūlūn hoped to reap from the Assembly. Ibn Tūlūn may have gained considerable ground in Egypt but in Syria and on the frontier his bid for legitimization fell short.

The second of the two long-term factors was suggested earlier: the *amīr*'s abiding ties to the imperial center. This second factor is closely related to the politics surrounding the Damascus Assembly (Ibn Tūlūn's defense of al-Mu'tamid and, thus, the interests of the caliphate). The two factors, in other words, were closely entwined; Ibn Tūlūn must certainly have looked to relations with 'Abbāsid circles as a further source of legitimization. The points of contact between Samarra and the Tūlūnid regime were various and, in some cases, bore long roots. This is to argue, in part, that Ibn Tūlūn – a son of Samarra – retained connections to that city's political and military culture throughout his life. It is to place him at the intersection of a network of relationships linking Tūlūnid Egypt to Syrian and Iraqi circles. In his reliance on these contacts, forged in most cases of (expectations of) loyalty and mutual interests, the *amīr* behaved much like his 'Abbāsid-era peers.

The various strands of association took shape at different stages. Ibn Tūlūn's early years have been alluded to already: Ibn al-Dāya and al-Balawī, in treating his origins, make much of Ibn Tūlūn's debt to his father's colleagues in the Samarran military.¹¹⁸ This is to take into account the *amīr*'s background in weighing his later political choices.¹¹⁹ The sources indicate that Ibn Tūlūn was supported by his father's colleagues following the latter's death in 240/854–5; that he achieved considerable standing among the Turks of Samarra thereafter; and, on the basis of his growing reputation, that he caught the eye of Bāyakbāk (d. 256/869–70), the recently appointed governor of Egypt. The latter saw fit to appoint the young officer as his *khalīfa*.¹²⁰ The critical early relationship, however, was with Yārjūkh (d. 258/872), another of Samarra's Turkish commanders and Bāyakbāk's successor as Egypt's overlord.¹²¹ Following his appointment,

¹¹⁸ Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, 116–18.

¹¹⁹ See Hassan, *Tulunides*, 28–9.

¹²⁰ See al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 33–42.

¹²¹ Ibid., 45–6, and see Hassan, *Tulunides*, 45, citing al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab*.

Yārjūkh confirmed Ibn Tūlūn in office and assigned him territories outside al-Fustāṭ, including Alexandria; this was the first step in the expansion of his authority. Ties strengthened between the two men with Ibn Tūlūn's marriage to Yārjūkh's daughter (Khātūn); in addition, some time following the older man's death, Ibn Tūlūn saw to the transfer of his offspring to Egypt.¹²²

If, in its details, the (narrated) sequence of events seems overly tidy, the point is clear: Ibn Tūlūn owed his office and initial rise to prominence to the senior Turkish command. In treating his ties to the Turkish military, two further questions arise, neither of which is easily resolved given the state of current evidence. How long did the *amīr* sustain these ties? The evidence, thin, suggests that he drew on the support of the Samarran military for the duration of his career; several references describe efforts by Tayfūr al-Turkī – identified as Ibn Tūlūn's deputy (*khalīfa*) in Iraq¹²³ – to communicate with the Turkish officer corps on the *amīr*'s behalf. One report has Tayfūr distribute sums sent him from al-Qaṭā'i in a successful effort to dissuade fellow officers from supporting al-Muwaffaq against the Tūlūnid regime.¹²⁴ (The same report has financial backing provided to Ibn Tūlūn by Iraqi merchants, suggesting, of course, another link in these networks). In addition, scattered through the biographies are references to individuals, bearing Turkish-sounding names, and serving the Tūlūnid regime in mostly a military capacity. It appears that at least several of these men served the Tūlūnid house over long years. Tayfūr was one such individual; Ṭukhshī ibn Bulbard (?) a second; Ṭabārjī (?), a third.¹²⁵ This last individual led Ibn Tūlūn's forces against al-'Abbās in 267/880–1.¹²⁶ There is little way to tell, however, at what stage these persons joined with Ibn Tūlūn and in what ways; the principal security office (*shurṭa*) was assigned nearly exclusively to "Turks" through the Tūlūnid period.¹²⁷

The second and wider question concerns the appointments of Turkish commanders to third/ninth-century Egypt; Ibn Tūlūn was but one in a series of these men. But did the province constitute for the Samarran Turkish command a long-term interest? The question seems obvious, given the history of these appointments; the earliest dates to the caliphate of al-Mu'taṣim

¹²² Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 45–6 (appointments); 153–4 (Yārjūkh's offspring); and al-Kindī, *Governors*, 216 (Alexandria).

¹²³ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 60.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60–2.

¹²⁵ For references to Ṭukhshī and Ṭabārjī, see the index to al-Balawī's *Sīra*. A proper reading of the proper names is problematic. See Bosworth, "Turkish Personal Names," 97–103.

¹²⁶ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 264–8.

¹²⁷ See Hassan, *Tulunides*, 195.

(r. 218/833–227/842) and the assignment of Ashinās.¹²⁸ But the sources, in fact, provide few direct indications of what the appointments entailed (and modern scholarship has not pursued the topic fully).¹²⁹ They say nothing, for example, about who received and dispersed Egyptian tribute once it arrived in Samarra. There is much to suggest nonetheless that the Samarran Turkish command went to considerable lengths in defending its political and economic interests in Iraq. Given Egypt's wealth and prestige, it seems implausible that they would not have made similar efforts there as well. Thus, it may be that Ibn Tūlūn arrived in al-Fusṭāṭ with the expectation that he represent such interests in some fashion. If such was the case – that he was beholden, at least early on, to a specific imperial circle and its aims – the sources do not let on.

Ibn Tūlūn's contacts included relations with two caliphs, al-Musta'īn (r. 248/862–252/866) and al-Mu'tamid (r. 256/870–279/892). Relations with the first of the two monarchs occurred early in his career, and are reported to have done much to raise the young officer's profile in Samarra prior to his appointment, whereas those with al-Mu'tamid, as seen already, occurred in a later and very different context.¹³⁰ In reading this material, it is worth recalling that the turmoil in Samarra had much to do with the rivalries of military-bureaucratic cliques, each pushing the candidacy of specific 'Abbāsid princes. The biographies tell of efforts by Qabīḥa, the mother of al-Mu'tazz (r. 252/866–255/869), backed by her son's followers, to have Ibn Tūlūn execute al-Musta'īn in exchange for an appointment over Wāsiṭ. Ibn Tūlūn refuses, declaring himself bound to the caliph by the oath of *bay'a*.¹³¹ If obvious, perhaps, in its hagiographical intent, the report speaks nonetheless to the climate in which the *amīr* operated. It is striking, in reading the biographies, to see how far Ibn Tūlūn dwarfs the figures of both caliphs with whom he so closely interacted. That he presides over every page of the *Sīra* is to be expected; what is more surprising perhaps is how unimpressive each of the two monarchs appears in contrast.

Ibn Tūlūn's relations with the imperial center, finally, involved close interaction with the empire's administrative and bureaucratic sectors. There is rather little information on hand regarding Tūlūnid administrative history,

¹²⁸ Al-Kindī, *Governors*, 194–6, and Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, 2:280. Also see Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, 18.

¹²⁹ See al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 32–3, and Kennedy, "Egypt as a Province," 82–5. The best source on the appointees is al-Kindī, *Governors*.

¹³⁰ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 36–41 (al-Musta'īn), *passim* (al-Mu'tamid). For discussion, see Bonner, "Ibn Tūlūn's Jihad," 582–3, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, *passim*.

¹³¹ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 40, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 32.

but, as Hassan points out, it must certainly be the case that the shift to greater autonomy meant an expansion in the size of the Egyptian bureaucracy in this period.¹³² Fragmentary evidence indicates that Ibn Tūlūn succeeded in recruiting a number of individuals and families from Iraq to serve his emergent regime. This, among other developments considered here, does much to undercut the argument that Ibn Tūlūn sought to free Egypt from its imperial grip. But, once again, ambiguity prevailed. The biographers have the *amīr* declare himself committed to training and promoting Egyptian-born officials: in one anecdote, he is content with the lesser skills of an Egyptian *kātib*, relative to that of his Iraqi predecessor, precisely because the former figure had local roots and, thus, commitments.¹³³ The reference is belied, however, by Ibn Tūlūn's reliance on the skills of the immigrant officials.

Key members of the regime, then, were non-Egyptians, the majority, it appears, transplanted Iraqi officials, most trained in either Baghdad or Samarra. The list is impressive and, again, speaks to the extent of Ibn Tūlūn's reliance on this particular set of contacts: Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Kān (d. 270/884); Ishāq ibn Nuṣayr al-Baghdādī (d. 279/892); Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mādharaī (d. 270/884) and his offspring; Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥājir and his kin; and others.¹³⁴ These men held high-level posts in various bureaus of the Tūlūnid administration; members of the Mādharaī house would serve the dynasty throughout and, following the dynasty's destruction in 292/905, return to 'Abbāsid service in Iraq.¹³⁵ Unfortunately, the sources only hint at the motivations of these individuals in taking up positions in Egypt. The assumption, in many cases, is that the option of accepting lucrative posts in a stable working environment proved very attractive. Here, too, in his ability to offer such opportunities at the regional level, and particularly to younger, up-and-coming officials, Ibn Tūlūn represented an emergent Near Eastern political order. The assumption must be, however, that he sought out these men not only for their training and skills, which were sorely required if Egypt was to be properly administered, but for their extensive contacts to the imperial center as well.

Ibn Tūlūn is a deeply interesting figure, not least because of the seeming ambiguities of his approach to power. The effort here has been to consider but two significant features of his career. If the factor of legitimization had to do with

¹³² Hassan, *Tulunides*, 279.

¹³³ Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 106–7.

¹³⁴ See Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt," 97 (it does not appear, however, that Ibn al-Dāya held an administrative position), and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 279–87.

¹³⁵ Gottschalk, "al-Mādharaī," *EI*².

constraints on Ibn Tūlūn's ability to achieve overarching prestige, the matter of his network of "kinship and patronage" goes more directly to his commitment to (some version) of the status quo.¹³⁶ To opt for a fully independent polity would have been to throw over the very political arrangements and patterns of conduct on which rested his rise to prominence. The *amīr* opted for loyal service but, clearly, of a very restless sort.

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¹³⁶ See Bonner's perceptive remarks, "Ibn Tūlūn's Jihad," 593. He cites Mottahedeh's *Loyalty and Leadership* (1980).

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CHAPTER 10

Eighth-Century Indian Astronomy in the Two Cities of Peace

Kevin van Bladel

The Bhagavān [i.e., Brahmā] said to him: hear, [my] child, the knowledge of calculation ...

Paitāmahasiddhānta (c. 450 CE) III.1¹

• • •

We, servants of His Majesty, state humbly: the method of the *Jiuzhi Calendar* 九執曆 was originated by Brahma [*fantian* 梵天] ...

Jiuzhi li, wr. 718 CE by *GAUTAMA *SIDDHĀRTHA (QUTAN XIDA瞿曇悉達)²

• • •

He was the Great Brahman, the most magnificent king... He gathered the wise men, and they originated the book of the *Sindhind* during his reign... From this, the books like the *Arjabhar* and the *Almagest* are derived...

AL-MAS'ŪDĪ, *Murūj*, 1.76

¹ Trans. Pingree, "Paitāmahasiddhānta," 476.

² Trans. Yabuuti, "Researches," 11. This paper follows the standard but misleading practice of rendering all Chinese characters as modern spoken Mandarin, using the pinyin system. Where Indic names have been identified underlying the characters in their early Middle Chinese pronunciation, they are given in their Sanskrit forms with an *asterisk in the first instance to indicate that these are reconstructed as represented by the Chinese characters.

The Early Indophile Episode in Arabic in its Context

The 'Abbāsid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–75) and the powerful vizier Yaḥyā ibn Khālid ibn Barmak (fl. 774–803) became the first patrons of Sanskrit scholarship in Arabic translation – more generally, some of the first patrons of the sciences of any kind in Arabic. But Indian learning was their main object. After them, there is no clear sign of the further importation of Indian scientific traditions into Arabic for two centuries, until the career of al-Bīrūnī (fl. c. 1000–50), who devoted himself to Sanskrit studies, among many other things, with the support of the Ghaznavid conquerors of north-western India. In the ninth century, Arabic scholars as far as Central Asia became interested much more in scientific traditions of Greek origin and the works of Ptolemy, Galen, Aristotle, and others. When viewed in hindsight through the history of Arabic scholarship, the late eighth-century interest in Indian learning among the rulers of an empire governed from Mesopotamia is therefore unusual and noteworthy. As such it requires an explanation. But discerning the history of this early Indophile episode in Arabic science is difficult because it is not well documented and because Arabic works of Indian origin have scarcely survived after becoming gradually obsolete in the following centuries, during which the more numerous Greek works in Arabic translation grew current. The interest to explain the transmission of Indian science to Baghdad in the second half of the eighth century is all the greater as it immediately antedates and sets the stage for the main period of translations from Greek into Arabic. Any such explanation should account not only for the conditions for reception in Baghdad, but also for the status and availability of Sanskrit scholarship at the time.

Of course, many factors were involved. It is well known that the success of the 'Abbāsid revolution brought numerous individuals from eastern Iran and Central Asia into positions of power, both Arabs who had settled or grown up there as well as Iranians (people of Sogdia, Tukharistan, and others) who joined them.³ They formed, in Patricia Crone's words, "a new elite that did not identify itself in terms of ethnicity"; rather "it was their political role [in the 'Abbāsid revolution] that singled them out from everybody else,"⁴ as *abnā' al-dawla* or *ahl al-dawla*, the people of the revolution. The hybrid culture that they fostered held ancient traditions of book-learning in high esteem to an extent that the elites of the previous, Umayyad Arab dynasty did not. The earliest definitely attested translations of scientific works into Arabic appear

³ Karev, "La politique d'Abū Muslim," 2.

⁴ Crone, "'Abbāsid Abnā'," 13.

already under the reign of al-Manṣūr.⁵ Dimitri Gutas securely contextualizes al-Manṣūr's patronage of translations from older literary traditions into Arabic with a new imperial ideology deliberately hearkening back to that of the centralizing late Sasanian Persian Empire of the period of Khusrō I (r. 531–78), whose court was remembered as a center of scholarship and of the recovery by translation of hitherto lost ancient learning. Al-Manṣūr's policy was not only for the cultivation of useful sciences, but also was calculated to harness the support of Iranian subjects still being integrated into the ruling class in the empire of the caliphs, subjects who would approve of the revival of a well-regarded Sasanian tradition.⁶ While this explains the new support for scholarship in general, which necessitated the translation of ancient learning into Arabic, it does not, however, explain by itself why Indian learning in particular was cultivated in the new city of Baghdad at the outset of the long period of Arabic translations.⁷

In a different study, I introduced a factor specific to the problem by demonstrating that Sanskrit learning, connected with the study of Buddhism but including scientific traditions in fields such as astrology and medicine, was known and available in the eastern Iranian region of Tukharistan (ancient Bactria) in the eighth century. The Barmak, father of the Barmakid family of officers and viziers, had been trained, in the course of his Buddhist education, in astrology and medicine in Kashmir, a major center of Sanskrit learning in the eighth century. In the last quarter of the eighth century his grandson, the powerful vizier Yahyā ibn Khalid ibn Barmak, paid for Arabic translations of Sanskrit scientific works, recruited Indian physicians for a hospital in Baghdad, and commissioned an expedition to India which reported on Indian religions and other matters. This was due to his family's Buddhist and Bactrian (not Persian) cultural background, in which Indian learning was deemed important.⁸

This accounts for most of the known early translations from Sanskrit into Arabic. In that study, however, I also noted one major exception to the pre-eminent role of Yahyā ibn Khālid in the translation of Sanskrit learning into

5 The only known possible exception is the astrological *Kitāb al-Mawālīd* of Zardusht. This was translated from Middle Persian sometime in the years 748–55, and therefore possibly a few years earlier. It is discussed further below.

6 Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 34–52.

7 Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 24–5, briefly acknowledges the existence of translations from Sanskrit into Arabic, particularly astronomical works, and the importance of the scholars involved in this transmission.

8 van Bladel, "Bactrian Background."

Arabic.⁹ Already (as far as sources show) before the appointment of Yahyā to any high office, the caliph al-Manṣūr had ordered the composition of a book presenting Indian methods of astronomical calculation (*hisāb*), provided by an Indian visitor to his court in the year 154/770–1 or 156/772–3 who knew it.¹⁰ The man that al-Manṣūr put in charge of the rendering of this method into Arabic was the astrologer al-Fazārī, who created an Arabic work known as the *Kitāb al-Sindhind al-kabīr* (“The Great Book of the *Sindhind*”).¹¹ The word *Sindhind* here is an adaptation of the Sanskrit *siddhānta*, referring to a comprehensive astronomical treatise.¹² Al-Manṣūr’s sponsorship of the creation of the *Sindhind* system of astronomical calculation out of Indian materials was unprecedented, in that (as far as is known for sure) nothing was translated directly from Sanskrit into Arabic before that time.¹³ The resulting book was

⁹ van Bladel, “Bactrian Background,” 82–3.

¹⁰ The two accounts vary in significant details besides the date. Al-Bīrūnī (*al-Hind*, 208:15–16) indicates that al-Fazārī and Ya’qūb ibn Tāriq derived their information about the Indian cycles from an Indian man in the company of an embassy (*wāfd*) from al-Sind to al-Manṣūr that arrived in 154 (770/1). The later date was reported in the lost *zīj* of Ibn al-Ādāmī, cited by Shā’id al-Andalusī (49) and Ibn al-Qiftī (270); this account says that the translation was prompted when “a man from India” (*rajul min al-Hind*) knowledgeable in the calculation (*al-hisāb*) known as *Sindhind* came before (*qadima ‘alā*) al-Manṣūr – with no mention of an embassy. See Pingree, “Ya’qūb,” 97–8. Importantly, neither account mentions a specific work, brought by the Indian, which was translated. Both accounts mention the Indian man himself as the source of the information, suggesting that he was the conveyer of one or more texts that he had memorized. Such a source could account for the “eclectic” character of the *Sindhind* in Arabic (Pingree, “Fazārī,” 105), representing some intermixture of the Indian astronomical systems found in different extant Sanskrit works.

¹¹ Pingree, “al-Fazārī.” Pingree interpreted this title as “The Book of the Great *Sindhind*,” leading him to propose many times that a work called **Mahāsiddhānta*, or “Great *Siddhānta*” in Sanskrit, underlay the Arabic title and was the sole basis of the translation. See first on this Pingree, “Ya’qūb,” 103, where he follows an apparent similar assumption by al-Bīrūnī. In his many later publications referring to this matter, Pingree’s tentative but unchallenged hypothesis often became an unqualified reference to an actual *Mahāsiddhānta*. The assumption of a Sanskrit work with this title seems unwarranted to me; the adjective *al-kabīr* almost certainly refers to the *kitāb* not the *sindhind*. Cf. the slightly earlier *Kitāb al-Ādāb al-kabīr* of Ibn al-Muqaffā’, with its title aptly rendered by Latham (“Ibn al-Muqaffā’,” 57) as “The Comprehensive Book of Rules of Conduct.” *Comprehensive* is surely likewise the sense of *al-kabīr*, “great,” in al-Fazārī’s title.

¹² I suspect that the word was written at first *sydhnd* in Arabic letters, and that the *yā’* was mistakenly pointed as a *nūn* early on when someone made an association between the proper title and the region of Sind. The catchy sound of the resulting two rhyming syllables ensured the future success of the mistake.

¹³ Pingree (“Greek Influence,” 38, and “Ilm al-Hay’ā,” *EI*²; also Kennedy, Pingree, and Haddad in al-Hāshimī, *Book of Reasons*, 207–17) claimed to have identified at least three other

also important in itself, becoming one of the first standards of astronomical calculation in Arabic (the other being the *Zīj al-Shāh*, then current in Middle Persian and translated at some time, perhaps later, into Arabic).¹⁴ It remained so for half a century, until al-Khwārizmī (fl. c. 800–50) composed his own *zīj*, or astronomical handbook, also called *al-Sindhind*, drawing from the *Kitāb al-Sindhind* of al-Fazārī but replacing parts of it with Greek elements from Ptolemy.¹⁵ For long thereafter, even while parameters from Ptolemy became standard, Indian astronomical material from the *Sindhind* circulated widely in Arabic, transmitted then further into medieval Latin.¹⁶ Pingree has pinpointed the antecedents of the mathematical methods and parameters of motion of the heavenly bodies used in the *Sindhind* of al-Fazārī in specific earlier Sanskrit works that were current in India at the time.¹⁷

Indian astronomical methods were probably not entirely new to the astrologers in al-Manṣūr's employ. The Sasanian Persian tradition of astronomy, in which they were working, in the medium of the Middle Persian language, seems to have already absorbed some Indian material in pre-Islamic times by translation from Sanskrit to Middle Persian, although the extent of this is not clear.¹⁸ It may at first seem obvious therefore that the interest specifically in

Arabic *zījes* translated from Sanskrit, including the *Zīj al-Arkand* allegedly translated from Sanskrit already in 735. These findings are not adequately documented (though partly accepted in the current standard reference on *zījes*: King and Samsó, “Astronomical Handbooks,” 35). Pingree himself suggested that his statements on the earliest Arabic *zījes* “may well be in need of some revision, and certainly will not be free from controversy” (“Ilm al-hay'a,” *EI*²). Because the evidence is complicated and Pingree’s arguments about these *zījes* are never presented clearly in one place, I will investigate the matter in another article. Suffice it to say for now that there is little solid evidence for any complete astronomical handbook in Arabic based on translations from Sanskrit besides the *Kitāb al-Sindhind* of al-Fazārī.

¹⁴ The Middle Persian astronomical handbook *Zīj al-Shāh* was employed by court astrologers such as Māshā'ullāh (Ibn Hibintā in Kennedy and Pingree, *Astrological History*, 65–6) before it was eventually translated into Arabic.

¹⁵ Pingree, “Ilm al-hay'a,” *EI*².

¹⁶ Pingree, “Indian and Pseudo-Indian Passages,” 151–69; Pingree, “Sindhind,” *EI*².

¹⁷ Pingree (“al-Fazārī,” 15, and “Indian and Pseudo-Indian Passages,” 151–69) found the sources of the *Sindhind* to be chiefly the *Paitāmahasiddhānta* of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, composed in Kashmir or the northern Panjab in the fifth century, and the *Brāhmaśphuṭasiddhānta*, which drew from it heavily, composed by Brahmagupta in Bhīllamalla in 628, though he added that also “some elements derived from the Āryabhaṭṭya of Aryabhaṭṭa are discernible in its fragmentary remains” (Pingree, “Ilm al-hay'a,” *EI*²).

¹⁸ There are reasons to hesitate about the Sasanian Middle Persian reception of Sanskrit astronomy and astrology, or at least about many of the specific conclusions of modern

the Indian astral sciences in this earliest instance could have been due just to al-Manṣūr's astrologers.¹⁹ In that case, al-Manṣūr's interest in importing

scholars concerning this reception. The main studies that claimed to demonstrate it are first Kennedy, "Sasanian Astronomical Handbook," followed and furthered by Pingree, "Astronomy and Astrology," 242–5; Pingree, "Persian 'Observation'"; and Pingree, *Thousands*, 12–13, all showing that parameters cited in Arabic as from the *Zīj al-shāh*, a lost work, are derived from Sanskrit astronomical tradition. These Indian parameters have been assumed to be present already in the Middle Persian original of the *Zīj al-shāh*. This may be correct, but one might at least consider the possibility that the *Zīj al-shāh*, on translation into Arabic from Middle Persian, was subject to revisions making its parameters to reflect the fresh currency of Indian parameters in Arabic. Such revisions are not unknown in the history of astronomical handbooks and tables. Another of the few possibly credible testimonies to the Sasanian reception of Indian astronomy is from Māshā'allāh, cited by al-Hāshimī, where it is stated that Khusrō I ordered Ptolemy's doctrine to be compared with the Indian *Arkand* system, and the latter was preferred as the basis for the *Zīj al-shāh* (al-Hāshimī, *Book of the Reasons*, f95r15–19; Pingree, *Thousands*, 12–13; Panaino, *Tessere*, 28–31). But to assess this report properly will require reviewing all the scattered evidence about the *Arkand*, something that has not been done adequately. Even the Indian elements that Pingree found in the horoscope of the world in the Middle Persian *Bundahishn* (*From Astral Omens*, 39–40), taken as evidence of a pre-Islamic Sasanian reception of Indian astrology, can easily be supposed to have been adopted by its ninth-century Zoroastrian author and compiler from the Indian material that became available in Arabic, in Baghdād, in the eighth century and was diffused from there. Panaino (*Tessere*, 19–42) also deals with this topic in order to provide a history of Sasanian astronomical tables, synthesizing Pingree's publications. In Panaino's account, there were several specific pre-Islamic redactions of sets of astronomical tables under Sasanian royal auspices containing Indian elements at every stage. But again there are problems in the handling of the main sources, all of which are from centuries later. For example, assuming, like Pingree, that a ninth-century Middle Persian source is revealing a pure Sasanian-period perspective, Panaino ("Astronomical Conference," 294–5; cf. Panaino, *Tessere*, 34–6) cites the second epistle of Zoroastrian Manushchihr, containing a passage that mentions the relative merits of the *zīg ī Shahryārān*, the *zīg* of the Indians, and the *zīg* of Ptolemy, as "confirm[ation]" that the use of these systems was mixed "in the Sasanian framework." Manushchihr, however, who wrote about 881 CE, can scarcely be said to operate in any Sasanian framework more than two centuries after the Arab conquest and one hundred years after the creation of the Arabic *Sindhind*. Indeed the *Sindhind*, which was then current, may be just what he means by "*zīg* of the Indians." Panaino (*Tessere*, 38) rather imagines that Manushchihr could actually be referring to real Sanskrit *siddhāntas* scarcely known, even by name, by the leading astronomers working in Mesopotamia or Iran in his period. Examples of the problematic interpretation of the Arabic sources on this topic could be multiplied. The Sasanian reception of Indian learning may well turn out to be substantial, but the evidence is quite scanty and the matter needs a cautious review.

¹⁹ So I argued: van Bladel, "Bactrian Background," 81–3. This article adds further context to that view.

Indian methods of astronomical calculation may appear to be sufficiently explained by the various factors just outlined: by their inherent utility, by the caliph's adoption of the image of respected Iranian patrons of science of the past, like Khusrō I, and by his court astrologers' possible prior knowledge of elements of Indian astronomy through the medium Middle Persian, leading them to appreciate it so much as to want more. But the Greek astral sciences were apparently better known to astrologers working in the Middle Persian tradition than Sanskrit astronomy was.²⁰ Therefore, these factors, while generally relevant, still do not explain why Indian astronomy at the outset was preferred over Greek astronomy, and in particular over Ptolemy, whose methods and parameters, from his *Almagest* and his *Handy Tables*, would indeed come eventually to be more widely employed in Arabic. After all, the translation of Greek astronomical and astrological materials into Arabic would have essentially the same utility and could serve the same ideological purposes. Greek learning was not unknown in the court, either, particularly in Middle Persian versions.²¹ Some of Ptolemy's astronomical work was apparently known in Middle Persian.²² Of the reasons just offered – all of which probably played

20 A list of Greek authors known in Middle Persian is given by Theophilus of Edessa (CCAG 1:129–31; see also van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes*, 34) and Ibn Nawbakht (cited in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, 2:134:12–16, translated by van Bladel, “Arabic History of Science,” 47). We have no such list of Sanskrit authorities known in Middle Persian. See also the next note.

21 At least five works translated first from Greek into Middle Persian and then from Middle Persian into Arabic have so far been identified: see van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes*, 27 n. 20. An early Arabic translation of the first part of Aristotle’s logical works and Porphyry’s *Introduction* to them was also made in the time of al-Manṣūr, associated, among other figures involved, with either Ibn al-Muqaffā’ (d. 756), the famous secretary, or his son, (d. c. 760). Much remains unclear about this work, including the language from which it was translated; a Middle Persian antecedent for an early translation of the logic is not yet entirely ruled out. See most recently D’Ancona, “Traduzioni,” 202–3, and Gutas, “Wiedergeburt,” 72–4.

22 The availability of the *Almagest* and *Handy Tables* in the eighth century is difficult to assess. A Middle Persian version of the *Almagest* seems to have existed: it was tested against the Indian *Arkand* in the court of Khusrō I, according to Māshā’allāh as cited by al-Ḥāshimī (*Book of Reasons*, f95; cf. Panaino, *Tessere*, 28–31). Ibn al-Nadīm (*Fihrist*, 2:215:5–8) relates that the *Almagest* was translated for Yaḥyā ibn Khālid ibn Barmak (imprisoned in 803, d. 805) and when the translation proved incomprehensible, it was revised by a team overseen by a certain Abū Ḥassān and Salm the Master of the *Bayt al-ḥikma* (on which see Gutas and van Bladel, “Bayt al-ḥikma,” *EI*³), the latter a known translator from Middle Persian into Arabic (Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:384:9–11). See also the argument of Kunitzsch that the *Almagest* was first translated from Middle Persian not Greek (Kunitzsch, *Almagest*, 115–25). Pingree shows that there was one anonymous commentator on the *Almagest* in late antiquity (Pingree, “Teaching of the Almagest”), but his

a role – this leaves only the cultural background of figures like the Barmakids, who advised the caliph, as a likely leading factor in the choice to translate astronomical methods from Sanskrit in particular. Yet, besides al-Manṣūr in the case of the *Sindhind*, the only patron whose name is specifically connected with translations from Sanskrit into Arabic as their commissioner or patron is Yahyā ibn Khālid ibn Barmak, whose career of political offices seems to have begun only at the very end of al-Manṣūr’s life, in 774/5, and *after* the creation of the *Kitāb al-Sindhind*. Perhaps his father, Khālid ibn Barmak, played an earlier role not mentioned in the sources; and no doubt others in the court, from Sogdia, Tukharistan, or neighboring regions, having a background similarly informing them about the value of Indian learning, advised their caliph on the matter without being mentioned in the sources as doing so. But given that we know very little about the discussions at the court, it is still worthwhile to look for other factors contemporary with al-Manṣūr, and not later, that may have given him reason to attribute special prestige to Indian methods of astronomy, particularly in the years leading up to 770–1 or 772–3, when al-Fazārī’s *Sindhind* is said to have been created.

The argument here is that al-Manṣūr was made aware that Indian astronomers were working in the Chinese Tang court and that he was, in his interest in Indian astronomy, effectively emulating the prestigious example that the Tang emperors established. As just explained, this was not at all the sole factor involved. That said, the Chinese government in this particular time endowed Indian astronomical learning with special status. It may sound far-fetched at first, but one must keep in mind above all the immediately preceding circumstances of the 750s and 760s, which were very different from those prevailing in the later heyday of translations into Arabic. The Tang Empire was the major power at the edges of Transoxania for just the first decade of ‘Abbāsid rule. The Tang considered lands as far as Farghāna as subject territories. The Chinese military presence was great in their Western Lands, the Anxi Protectorate, with four major garrisons in Karashahr, Kucha, Khotan, and Kashgar – this last city at the frontiers of the Arab conquest at the time. It administered the region with the same structure of government as in other Chinese prefectures.²³

speculation on the identity of the author is strained. Gutas (*Greek Thought*, 182–8), drawing on the studies of several Byzantinists, assembles a list of the earliest Greek scientific works copied in Byzantium. Of the ten oldest, estimated to have been copied in the period 800–30, no fewer than six are copies of the *Almagest* or commentaries on it. Despite all this, parameters from the *Almagest* are rare in the available traces of eighth-century Arabic astronomical works (e.g., Pingree, “al-Fazārī,” 106), where Indian methods prevail.

²³ Hansen, *Silk Road*, 79; Inaba, “Arab Soldiers in China,” 49.

In 750 the Tang Empire was at the acme of its might in Central Asia.²⁴ At the same time, the Sanskrit scientific traditions of medicine, astronomy, and astrology were widely sought by Asian rulers and patrons and enjoyed prestige far beyond India. Chinese kings had long been supporting Indian learning in their courts, but the Tang court was the pre-eminent locus for the patronage of Indian learning outside of India during al-Manṣūr's reign, as it had been for some decades. Besides their growing special interest in esoteric Buddhism (tantric Buddhism),²⁵ which provided them with magical rituals to empower themselves in the present life and encouraged them to support monasteries where Indian learning of this kind flourished,²⁶ the Tang emperors currently maintained Indian scholars in their Bureau of Astronomy, the ancient institution charged with regulating the calendar and the interpretation of astral omens for the emperor.²⁷ The two interests, both based on Indian learning, were closely linked, for practitioners of esoteric Buddhism cultivated an increasingly complicated set of rituals of star worship and an interest in the astral sciences.²⁸ When al-Manṣūr, as the new head of an extensive empire and the representative of a dynasty that had only just come to power, and whose rule was not uncontested, sponsored the translation of Indian astronomy, he was conforming to the most powerful contemporary royal standard in Asia in a way that would be appreciated by some of those whose support he sought, and he was betting on the reliability of the sort of methods used in the official astronomy of the most powerful neighboring empire.

There are strong reasons to think that al-Manṣūr and his advisors, including his court astrologers, were aware that Indian astronomers were employed in the Tang court and that, moreover, they were emulating this patronage. This factor, to be explained here, would prove to be short-lived, as was the interest in Indian science in Baghdad, because the far western extension of Chinese power collapsed irreparably before the end of al-Manṣūr's reign, disrupting contact thereafter between Baghdad and the Tang capital, Chang'an. The economy of the Anxi Protectorate, at the frontiers of the Arab conquests, and the surrounding regions declined precipitously thereafter as the massive "subsidies [that] underpinned the region's prosperity," brought by the large

²⁴ Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 136–7.

²⁵ On the debate about these terms, see Orzech, Sørensen, and Payne, "Introduction."

²⁶ Orzech, "Esoteric Buddhism in the Tang."

²⁷ Sivin, "Mathematical Astronomy."

²⁸ Sørensen, "Astrology and the Worship of the Planets"; see also Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 220–33, where the Taoist component of Chinese star-worship is emphasized.

and well-funded Chinese military presence, disappeared.²⁹ Chinese coins, previously common, went out of circulation, and the region's economy "reverted to a subsistence trade."³⁰ As H. A. R. Gibb persuasively imagined the Arab point of view on the decline of Chinese power in its westernmost province: "Men from the distant lands to whom China had seemed an immeasurably powerful and unconquerable Empire now saw with their own eyes the fatal weaknesses that Chinese diplomacy had so skillfully concealed. From this blow Chinese prestige never recovered."³¹

While it lasted, however, long-distance contact between al-Manṣūr and his Tang counterparts, Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–56) and his beleaguered successors Suzong 肇宗 (r. 756–62) and Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–79), provided one of the initial motives for the importation of specifically Indian astronomy to Baghdad, and was one of the sparks at the outset of the development of the sciences in Arabic. The remainder of this paper deals with the evidence.

Contacts between the 'Abbāsids and Chang'an

The first point is that the two courts were in frequent contact until the end of al-Manṣūr's reign (754–75). This has been discussed in many studies.³² The 750s in particular witnessed numerous embassies from the caliphs to the Tang. Reports about these embassies, deriving ultimately from court chronicles made at the time, are found in the massive historical compendium *Cefu Yuangui* 冊府元龜 (wr. 1005–13) as well as standard chronicles of the Tang dynasty. The specific purposes of the embassies on each occasion remain unknown because court chronicles recorded only the proceedings of the formal assembly in which ambassadors were received and gifts were exchanged, not private deliberations.³³ In any case, we learn that the Umayyads' ambassadors had been visiting the Tang court occasionally since the seventh century.³⁴ Arabic and

²⁹ Hansen, *Silk Road*, 237.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gibb, *Arab Conquests*, 97.

³² Some of the notable ones include Chavannes, "Notes"; Gibb, "Chinese Records" and *Arab Conquests*; Dunlop, "Arab Relations"; Petech, "Ambasciate arabe"; Behbehani, "Arab – Chinese Military Encounters"; and Inaba, "Arab Soldiers in China."

³³ Twitchett, *Official History*, 35–8.

³⁴ Petech, "Ambasciate arabe," 621–3, cites a few Chinese reports of embassies from Arab caliphs in the seventh century, one as early as the reign of 'Uthman in 651. It is difficult to assess the validity of these reports about early embassies. As regards the eighth-century embassies, Gibb's argument is sound ("Chinese Records," 620): "The authenticity of the entries is beyond all serious question, not only on the ground of the general reliability of

TABLE 11.1 *The first two Abbāsid caliphs and embassies to the Tang*

Year	Embassies to China	Reign of Abū l-'Abbās al-Saffāḥ (r. 750–754)
751		Battle of Talās between Chinese and Arab armies
753	3	"black-garment Arabs" (i.e., 'Abbāsids) mentioned in Chinese sources
754	2	Abū Muslim planning invasion of China via Kashgar
Year	Embassies to China	Reign of al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775)
755	1	Abū Muslim, Sunbādh put to death; astrological book of Zoroaster Translated sometime in 700–5
756	1	
757		Arabs among fighters securing throne for Tang emperor Suzong 肅宗
758	2	
760	1	
762	2	astrologically planned foundation of Baghdād, "The City of Peace"; Du Huan 杜環 goes home from Kūfa to Chang'an
769	1	
772	1	
773		<i>Kitāb al-Sindhind al-kabīr</i> composed by al-Fazārī in 770–1 or 772–3
774	1	

No Further embassies to the Tang except in 791 and 798, in reign of Hārūn al-Rashid.

Chinese sources agree in reporting one in 713, when al-Hajjāj is said to have charged Qutayba ibn Muslim with invading China and the latter planned an attack on Kashgar.³⁵ Édouard Chavannes and Gibb counted 20 more reported

Chinese official records in these matters, but on the internal evidence offered by the accuracy of detail. The caliph in 716 was actually Sulayman [as reported about the embassy in that year], and the appearance of the 'Arabs with black garments' coincides exactly with the establishment of the 'Abbasid power.'

35 Ibid.; Gibb, "Arab Invasion"; Behbehani, "Arab – Chinese Military Encounters," 70, 82–4; Petech, "Ambasciate arabe," 623–4.

embassies from Arab caliphs to the Tang court over the next four decades, the last in 142/759–60.³⁶ No fewer than 10 of these 20, mentioned on the basis of the compendious *Cefu Yuangui*, come from the “black-garment Arabs” (*heiyi dashi* 黑衣大食), i.e., the ‘Abbāsids, in just the seven years from January 753 to January 760.³⁷ Petech found reports on the same embassies from other sources as well as five still later embassies, not considered by Chavannes or Gibb, dated to 762, 762/3, 769, 772, and 774, i.e., all from the reign of al-Manṣūr.³⁸ Even if a few of the reports are erroneous or doublets, there were clearly many such embassies in the first quarter century of the ‘Abbāsid dynasty. They took place in the midst of a complicated web of long-distance diplomacy for the Chinese – beyond the limits of their western control, simultaneous with a contest over territory with Turkic and Tibetan competitors – because the struggling eastern Iranian and western Himalayan and Pamir dynasties, which the Arabs eventually subdued and whose lands they colonized or otherwise dominated, were simultaneously sending their own embassies requesting Chinese aid against the Arabs.³⁹ This means also that the embassies were not likely to be a trivial matter for the Arabs.

The densest cluster of embassies occurs in the years after a direct military clash that arose between the two powers in 751, soon after the ‘Abbāsid revolution. Both the Arabs and the Chinese sought to intervene in a conflict between Shāsh and Tashkent on their mutually shared frontier.⁴⁰ As a result, an army loyal to the ‘Abbāsids, led by Ziyād ibn Ṣalīḥ al-Khuzā‘ī (d. 752/3), famously fought a five-day battle with a Chinese army, led by the Korean general Gao Xianzhi (高仙芝, d. 756), near the Talas river in 751 (Arabic *Tarāz*). The Arab side won with the aid of a troop of Qarluqs who defected from the Chinese to their own forces.⁴¹ One of the few sources on these events, preserved by al-Maqdisī, adds that Abū Muslim was preparing for a subsequent invasion of China. No doubt the wealth captured at Talas had shown the potential of such

³⁶ Chavannes, “Notes,” 30–96; Gibb, “Chinese Records,” 619–20, summarizing on the basis of Chavannes, but missing a few embassies where more than one occurred in a single year. Chavannes’ and Gibb’s dates are in a few instances slightly imprecise as the Chinese and the Julian calendars do not correspond exactly. The last embassy is reported to have occurred in a Chinese month equivalent to 24 December 759–22 January 760; Gibb and Chavannes both list it as during 759.

³⁷ The first ‘Abbāsid embassy arrived not in 752 (as reported by Chavannes and Gibb) but in January 753 (thus correctly Petech, “Ambasciate arabe,” 627; and Inaba, “Arab Soldiers in China,” 45).

³⁸ Petech, “Ambasciate arabe,” 629–30.

³⁹ For a notable attempt to narrate all of this, see Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 108–42.

⁴⁰ Karev, “La politique d’Abū Muslim,” 11–16.

⁴¹ Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 139–40.

an enterprise. Abū Muslim was distracted, however, by the effort of his fellow revolutionaries to check his power.⁴² But just at this time, the embassies representing the first two ‘Abbāsid caliphs at the Tang court begin, and with surprising frequency. The first of these, in 753, comes from a certain Xieduo Hemi 謝多訶密 of the “black-garment Arabs,” which has been interpreted as either Ziyād *amūr* (i.e., Ziyād ibn Ṣalīḥ) or Sa‘id ibn Ḥumayd (the latter in charge of the garrison at Talas).⁴³ Yury Karev is right to assume that the embassies of 753–4 were partly intended to gather intelligence for the prospective invasion.⁴⁴

Gibb argued that the embassies probably did not come from the caliphs themselves, but from their governors of Khurāsān.⁴⁵ This would mean, for example, that they represented Abū Muslim for the period from 753–4, and not the caliphs Abū al-‘Abbās (r. 750–4) and al-Manṣūr (r. 754–5) directly. Minoru Inaba follows this view, too, suggesting further, it seems, that the frequency of the embassies (three in 753 alone) may be due to their coming from leaders of different factions in the ‘Abbāsid revolution in rapid succession.⁴⁶ If true, it would only argue for greater familiarity with the Tang court among the participants in the new ‘Abbāsid government. It seems unlikely to me, however, that a regional governor, even one such as Abū Muslim who could attempt to defy the caliph himself, would have engaged in secret independent diplomacy with another state of such power, immediately after a major battle with that power from which much booty came, without consulting his sovereign at all or apprising him of any outcomes. I see no reason to imagine that al-Manṣūr

⁴² See the astute analysis by Karev, “La politique d’Abū Muslim,” 6–7, 11–16. The report transmitted by al-Maqdisī, *al-Bad'*, 6:74–5, is clear: “They imprisoned twenty-five thousand . . . The Muslims took control over their army camp . . . They confiscated their possessions . . .” (*wa-asara khamsa wa-‘ishrīn alfān . . . fa-stawla al-muslimūn ‘alā ‘askarīhim . . . wa-stasfā amwālahum . . .*). Then: “Abū Muslim planned to invade China. He prepared equipment for this but he was distracted from it when Ziyād ibn Ṣalīḥ presented a letter to him from Abū al-‘Abbās making him [i.e., Ziyād] governor of Khurāsān” (*wa-hamma Abū Muslim bi-ghazw al-Ṣīn wa-hayya‘a uhhbatan li-dhālika wa-shaghalaḥū ‘anhu iżħār Ziyād ibn Ṣalīḥ kitāban min Abī al-‘Abbās bi-wilāyatihī ‘alā Khurāsān*).

⁴³ Karev, “La politique d’Abū Muslim,” 22–3, sees Sa‘id (ibn) Ḥumayd in the reconstructed Early Middle Chinese pronunciation of these characters, based on Pulleyblank’s system: *Zia^hta xamit*. La Vaissière and Petech (cited by Inaba, “Arab Soldiers in China,” 56) see the name as representing Ziyād instead. Abū Muslim beheaded Ziyād ibn Ṣalīḥ that year (135 AH, or 18 July 752–6 July 753; Karev, “La politique d’Abū Muslim,” 25); given that the embassy came to China in January, a more precise date for Ziyād’s death may help in deciding between the two.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Gibb, “Chinese Records,” 621, followed by Dunlop, “Arab Relations,” 302.

⁴⁶ Inaba, “Arab Soldiers in China,” 45–6; cf. Gibb, “Chinese Records,” 618–19.

in particular never knew about these embassies or the transactions that took place, clearly in the name of the 'Abbāsids, particularly as they continue without break (albeit not as frequently) for almost 20 years after the death of Abū Muslim. If he did not hear about embassies from Abū Muslim at the time, he certainly must have learned about them later from figures like Sa'īd ibn Ḥumayd. The latter, once stationed at Talas, appears later in his career as an officer of al-Manṣūr in 772–3 and then his governor in Basra.⁴⁷ Al-Manṣūr was, rather, surely involved in and informed about some of the long-distance missions represented in the Tang court chronicles as coming specifically from the 'Abbāsids ("black-garment Arabs"). It was likely a serious concern, as the Tang were still receiving requests for military assistance from the deposed rulers of sites under Arab occupation and their restive heirs, men claiming the thrones of countries like Samarkand and Tukharistan. Gibb is right, however, to assume that much of the staff of the Arab embassies must have come from the farther reaches of Khurasan.⁴⁸ One expects that they were mostly Sogdians. Scholars have long noted the large number Sogdians in Tang China in the eighth century and their role as the middlemen of Asia has been strongly emphasized by historians.⁴⁹

On the basis of Chavannes' study of the Chinese reports, Gibb speculated that the embassies continued after 760 but unrecorded. One would have thought rather that they were broken off because of the ongoing crises and devastation triggered by the famous rebellion of the half-Sogdian, half-Turk An Lushan 安祿山 (*Rokhshan the Bukharan, d. 757). He and his would-be Yan 燕 dynasty successors (755–63) caused severe and widespread disruption for the Tang state, for the trans-Asian caravan trade, and for the economy of the Anxi Protectorate, which was gradually abandoned to local governors thereafter. These events are regarded by specialists in China as one of the turning points in all of Chinese history. To fight the rebellion, the Tang emperor Suzong issued a call to recruit soldiers from the Western Countries, as far as Farghāna, in 757. Among the various Central Asian recruits, the chronicles of the Tang specify Arab fighters. Inaba may be right to suppose that these Arabs were soldiers of fortune left over from losing parties in the wake of the 'Abbāsid revolution, and not military aid sent by al-Manṣūr himself, but all this suggests

⁴⁷ Karev, "La politique d'Abū Muslim," 24.

⁴⁸ Gibb, "Chinese Records," 622.

⁴⁹ La Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 119–57; Hansen, *Silk Road*, 157–9; Sims-Williams, "Sogdian Merchants."

further that many Arabs were in a position to be well informed about China in the 750s.⁵⁰

Gibb turns out to have been right. As Luciano Petech has shown, the embassies from the “black-garment Arabs” continued to be reported until the end of the reign of al-Manṣūr (754–775). They cease to appear for a few decades after al-Manṣūr. Two more are known to have reached the Tang court, in 791 and 798, under Hārūn al-Rashīd and at the height of Barmakid power.⁵¹ At that time, the two states no doubt had to discuss their relations with the Uighurs. But the fact remains that no fewer than 15 embassies are reported as representing the ‘Abbāsids to the Tang from 753–74. Ten of these come from the reign of al-Manṣūr and they span his entire reign. There is every reason to think, therefore, that al-Manṣūr had a role in these and that he was informed in at least a general way about the state of the Tang Empire and its court.

Some of the thousands of prisoners from the Chinese army defeated at Talas were brought as far as Iraq in these years. A certain Du Huan 杜環 was captured after the Battle of Talas and was brought to Kufa, the initial capital of the ‘Abbāsids. In 762 he was allowed to return home,⁵² where he composed a Chinese work reporting about his journeys. The work is lost, but excerpts survive in an institutional history, the *Tongdian* 通典 of Du You 杜佑 (wr. 801), a Tang official and a relative of his.⁵³ The surviving excerpt describes Kufa and the culture and products of the people there.⁵⁴ Significantly, he mentions personal names of four other Chinese men he knew there who worked as painters and silk weavers. These have been reasonably assumed to be Du Huan’s

50 Inaba, “Arab Soldiers in China,” does not address the report that an Arab embassy representing the ‘Abbāsids came to Suzong just after he was made emperor (Chavannes, “Notes,” 93). At the time, Suzong was based in a western province and did not even regain the capital, Chang’an, for the Tang until December 757 (Goble, “Amoghavajra,” 757). It was during this time that he actively recruited western barbarians, including Arabs, for his effort to defeat the rebels. While recognizing that Inaba’s view may be correct, a case could just as easily be made to connect this embassy and the arrival of Arab mercenaries soon thereafter (cf. Gibb, “Chinese Records,” 618–19).

51 Petech, “Ambasciate arabe,” 630, where it is suggested moreover that al-Fadl ibn Yahyā ibn Khālid ibn Barmak was responsible.

52 Presumably he was sent back along with one of the two embassies dated to that year (Petech, “Ambasciate arabe,” 630).

53 For Du You and his context, see Pulleyblank, “Neo-Confucianism,” 97–106.

54 The passage is translated by Wakeman, *Western Barbarians*, 892–925, and is conveniently excerpted by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 244–9.

fellow prisoners of war.⁵⁵ Here then are five Chinese known by name, at least one of them (Du Huan himself) a literate man from a family of officials in the Chinese capital, residing in the early capital of al-Manṣūr. Again, they indicate that sources of information about contemporary China were available particularly in al-Manṣūr's reign.

Beyond these men, Arabic sources say very little about Chinese embassies to Damascus or Baghdad. But there must have been westward-bound embassies. One earlier example survives by chance in an anecdotal report: a Chinese envoy to foreign lands was met in Tukharistan, around 726 in the winter, by the traveling Buddhist monk Huichao 慧超 of Silla.⁵⁶ Al-Ya'qūbī (c. 900) records that many eastern kings, including the king of China, sent a delegation upon the accession of al-Manṣūr's son, al-Mahdī (r. 775–85) “to acknowledge their submission.”⁵⁷ If a Chinese delegation did arrive, this may suggest that the Tang emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–79) recognized the significance of the death of al-Manṣūr, who had communicated with him and his father over many years.

So there were very many points of contact in the 750s, and before, and perhaps after, but official contacts were most intense in the early reign of al-Manṣūr and the years immediately prior. We are unfortunately largely in the dark about the transactions that occurred through the embassies. Tang chronicles state that the “black-garment Arabs” sent them gifts.⁵⁸ The ambassadors of the ‘Abbāsids received honorific titles and gifts in return. It is sensible to suppose that the diplomatic representatives of the ‘Abbāsids paid attention to and inquired about the state of things in the Tang court, and that expatriates from Central Asia, such as Sogdians, would have been the intermediaries and translators between the two parties.

The Interest in Astral Sciences among the Earliest ‘Abbāsids and their Supporters

The second point is that the Tang patronage of Indian astronomy and astrology (to which I return later) could not have escaped the attention of the representatives of the ‘Abbāsids, who likely were interested in such matters. The

⁵⁵ Pélidot, “Des artisans Chinois”; Wakeman, *Western Barbarians*, 915–16. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, omits this information from his excerpt of Wakeman with an ellipsis.

⁵⁶ *Hye-Ch'o*, 100–3; Fuchs, “Huei-ch'ao's Pilgerreise,” 466.

⁵⁷ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1:397–8.

⁵⁸ Chavannes, “Notes,” 30–96. Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 134–68, discusses the practices and patterns of the Tang reception of diplomatic envoys from abroad.

astronomy necessary for astrological techniques was important to them, for the ‘Abbāsid revolution brought a new concern for astrology into the halls of Arab government. There is plenty of evidence for this. Astrology appears to be the first science that found substantial caliphal support.⁵⁹ The demand for astrological expertise in the 750s, during which various factions vied for control of the new ‘Abbāsid state, is demonstrated first by the existence of the Arabic *Kitāb al-Mawālid* of Zardusht (Zoroaster). As the text itself states, it was translated from an Iranian language (*lughat al-Furs*, “Persian,” probably Middle Persian) by the order of a Persian commander in service of the ‘Abbāsids, Sunbādh the Isbabādh (“general”).⁶⁰ This puts the translation in a complicated political context. Sunbādh was an ardent supporter of the revolutionary commander Abū Muslim. Originally from near Nishapur, he was, as Crone has argued, a member of the Kanārang family, a noble house eminent in late Sasanian times.⁶¹ The first ‘Abbāsid caliph, Abū al-‘Abbās, delegated to Abū Muslim the government of Khurasan while he and his armies ousted the Umayyads in Syria. Of non-Arab Iranian background, Abū Muslim became the focus of devoted loyalty for a portion of the Eastern Iranian supporters of the ‘Abbāsid revolution. His influence was a threat to al-Manṣūr’s supremacy as caliph. After the death of Abū al-‘Abbās in 754, al-Manṣūr had Abū Muslim killed in 755 to secure his position. This led Sunbādh to launch a revolution at Rayy in the name of Abū Muslim. The revolution lasted only 70 days before Sunbādh’s followers were slaughtered on the field of battle and he himself was killed in flight. The Arabic translation of the *Kitāb al-Mawālid* was thus carried out at some stage of a series of major political coups. The text states that it was translated because Sunbādh wanted to make the book accessible, having recognized that the use of the language of the Persians (*lughat al-Furs*)⁶²

59 Much later, Ṣā’id al-Andalusī (1029–70) (*Tabaqāt*, 49) recognizes this, pairing the astral sciences with Aristotelian logic as the earliest sciences cultivated among the Arabs. The interest in logic, however, is represented by Ṣā’id with just one example, Ibn al-Muqaffa’s alleged translation of logical works of Aristotle. On this early collection of logical texts in Arabic translation, see note 21 above.

60 Pingree, *Mawālid*, paragraphs 30–1.

61 Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 32–40. Crone’s surmise in this discussion (34, n. 24) that the epithet of Abū Muslim in the *Kitāb al-Mawālid* translated by Afnan as “possessor of rule” was the much more significant *ṣāḥib al-dawla* in the original, unpublished Arabic turns out to be exactly correct (Pingree, *Mawālid*, paragraph 2). On Sunbādh see also Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 437–51, where she treats him in the context of her argument for a distinctive Parthian Mithraic religion.

62 The Arabic terms for “Persian” in this period misleadingly refer to the Iranian languages in general and not just to Persian proper.

was being neglected in favor of Arabic and that God had brought the *dawla* (“new regime”) of Abū Muslim, “the trustee and avenger of the House of the Prophet” (*wa-atā Allāh bi-dawlat al-amīr ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn [sic]⁶³ Muslim amīn ăl al-rasūl wa-tālib tha’rihim*).⁶⁴ It appears that several other components or companion works to this *Book of Zardusht* translated into Arabic do not survive. Only the section on birth horoscopes has been preserved.⁶⁵ Whatever is missing, there can be hardly any doubt that Sunbādh wanted astrology to serve the political purposes of the revolution (either that of the ‘Abbāsids or his own brief revolution) – as just shown, the political context is specified as one of the reasons for its translation – and he needed his Arabic-speaking comrades to believe in the uses to which he put it. The translation must have been made for Sunbādh in 755 or in the years just before. The text is remarkable for recognizing the *dawla* of Abū Muslim; this might be argued to pin the translation to the time just after Abū Muslim’s execution but before Sunbādh’s death, in 755.

While his embassies to the Tang court in its capital Chang’an 長安 (its name meaning “Eternal Peace”) were still going on, al-Mansūr was establishing a new, centrally planned capital upriver on the Tigris from the former Sasanian capital. It is in connection with the founding of this city that we have a significant report about this caliph’s patronage of astrologers. A team of them, including Nawbakht, Māshā’allāh, and ‘Umar ibn al-Farrukhān al-Tabarī, all Iranians, was consulted to determine the most auspicious time for the foundation of the new capital at Baghdad, officially “The City of Peace,” *Madīnat al-salām*, rendered in a work of Theophilus of Edessa, the court astrologer of al-Mahdī, as Εἰρηνόπολις (“city of peace”). The name of the city was drawn from the Qur’ānic expression *dār al-salām*,⁶⁶ referring to Paradise, coincidentally calling to mind the name of the Tang capital. The astrologically appointed time to begin the city’s construction was 30 July 762 CE.⁶⁷ That year two embassies were sent to China from the “black-garment Arabs,” one before and one after the official foundation.

Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785), just mentioned, was already serving supporters of the ‘Abbāsids as an astrologer by that time. A statement from his lost Syriac chronicle, preserved in translation in the later Christian Arabic

⁶³ Pingree’s unpublished translation of this passage emends it to read “Abū Muslim,” but Ibn Muslim is correct: see Barthold, “Abū Muslim,” *Er^l*. Abū Muslim was known also as *amīn ăl Muḥammad*: Karev, “La politique d’Abū Muslim,” 3; Agha, *Revolution*, 114.

⁶⁴ Pingree, *Mawālid*, paragraph 30.

⁶⁵ Ibid., commentary on paragraphs 1–8. See also Pingree, *From Astral Omens*, 44–5.

⁶⁶ Q 6.127; 10.26.

⁶⁷ Pingree, “al-Fazārī,” 104.

chronicle of Agapius of Manbij (wr. c. 940s), indicates that he was a witness to the wars of the 'Abbāsid revolution. Agapius inserts the passage immediately after the description of the wars leading up to final 'Abbāsid victory in 750. David Pingree supposes that Theophilus began serving the Umayyads and then switched sides, but the matter is not so clear. Theophilus' work on military astrology, preserved in Greek (and, Pingree claims, composed in Greek by Theophilus),⁶⁸ refers to his accompanying a campaign "by those then in power" against the oasis of Marw (χατά τὴν Μαργιανήν χώραν).⁶⁹ The main point here is that this astrologer was working for associates of the 'Abbāsid caliphs already before he became al-Mahdī's (r. 775–85) court astrologer.⁷⁰ Pingree discovered a clear resemblance between some of the doctrines of Theophilus in his work on military astrology and those of the Sanskrit *Bṛhadyātrā* (wr. c. 550) and other works of Varāhamihira (d. 578).⁷¹ He assumes that Theophilus knew such Indian astrological doctrines through the medium of a putative Middle Persian translation of a work of Varāhamihira (though we have no conclusive evidence that Theophilus read Middle Persian),⁷² but it may be more neatly assumed that he was familiar with Indian astrological doctrines from the Indian sage or sages in the court of al-Manṣūr, whose son he served.

The techniques of political astrology or historical astrology – the theory of Jupiter – Saturn conjunctions – were used to create arguments to demonstrate

68 Pingree, "From Alexandria," 14.

69 The reference to the land of Marw is more specific than to Khorāsān in general, as taken by Cumont (CCAG 5.1:234, n. 1), followed by Pingree (Pingree, "From Alexandria," 15). Pingree has produced the most detailed study of the life and career of Theophilus of Edessa to date (*ibid.*, 13–21). While it should be the foundation of all further research on this astrologer, much of it is speculative. See more recently Hoyland, *Theophilus*, 6–7, where Pingree's views are not mentioned.

70 Pingree noticed that an astrological doctrine attributed to Zoroaster is transmitted by Theophilus in a work of his extant in Greek, but his suggestion that this comes from the Arabic translation of the *Kitāb Zardusht* commissioned by Sunbādh is in doubt, as it is based on a wishful reading of an obscure Greek name ("From Alexandria," 14).

71 Pingree, "Indian and Pseudo-Indian Passages," 148–9.

72 Pingree supports the hypothesis by referring to a precedent he himself invented, when he postulated a Middle Persian translation of Varāhamihira's description of the iconography of the decans. This hypothesis, in all likelihood incorrect, was used to explain Abū Ma'shar's (d. 886) remarkable familiarity with Indian descriptions of the Decans; Pingree suggested that Abū Ma'shar was translating this from Middle Persian (Pingree, "Indian Iconography," 253). Abū Ma'shar, working as an astrologer in the ninth century, would rather be much more likely to have access to Indian descriptions of the Decans from the Indian sources in Arabic translation, rather than from an unattested source in Middle Persian, a language he probably did not know, originating as he did in Balkh.

(after the fact) that the advent of ‘Abbāsid power was dictated by heavenly cycles. A passage from Māshā’allāh, one of the astrologers just named, puts the strife connected with the change of rule from the Umayyads to the ‘Abbāsids in relationship with a Jupiter – Saturn conjunction.⁷³ While astrologers could and did also predict the end of the ‘Abbāsid dynasty using the same methods, in the 750s and 760s that was projected as a problem for later generations. The prediction of the end at a future time is in itself a legitimization of the present government, which implicitly is expected to continue beyond the present. It is true that Māshā’allāh’s interpretation of the heavenly indications of the ‘Abbāsid revolution, as we have it, was probably written down decades after the revolution itself, but there is no reason to suppose that these methods were not being consulted at the time. Indeed Ibn Khaldūn cites the elder Theophilus of Edessa for the view that the dominion of Islam would last for 960 years, the duration of a “Great Conjunction” in this system.⁷⁴ These astrologers were also using the horoscopes computed for the vernal equinox of the year of accession of a caliph to predict (or interpret retrospectively) the duration of each caliph’s reign.⁷⁵

It is clear therefore that astrology, from the outset of the new regime, held special utility for the new dynasty to generate a sense of political auspiciousness by advising on the best times for undertakings and, in effect, manufacturing a form of legitimization for the new rulers. It would be strange if a present concern such as this did not lead to any questions about the role of astrology in the rich and powerful Tang court while the embassies to that region were ongoing – to which I return below. The biggest impediment to this proposal is that there is little surviving evidence in Arabic to indicate any awareness in Baghdad of intellectual life in the Tang court, either at this time or for centuries thereafter. The Chinese were famous in early Arabic texts primarily for the fine crafts and silk that they exported westward and little else. There is, however, one small but significant piece of evidence at hand in the writings of one of the younger court astrologers of al-Manṣūr. Abū Sahl ibn Nawbakht succeeded his father as astrologer to al-Manṣūr by 775, just a few

⁷³ Māshā’allāh’s *Kitāb al-Qirānāt* in the epitome of Ibn Hibintā, in Kennedy and Pingree, *Astrological History*, 58–9 (facsimile f218r–218v).

⁷⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqadimmah*, 2:216. Was Theophilus the unidentified source for the doctrines of historical astrology held in common by Māshā’allāh, al-Kindī, and Abū Ma’shar (Yamamoto and Burnett, *Abū Mašar*, 1:525–7)?

⁷⁵ Māshā’allāh’s *Fī qiyām al-khulafā’*, partial edition in Yamamoto and Burnett, *Abū Mašar*, 1:545–53, English translation and commentary in Kennedy and Pingree, *Astrological History*, 129–43.

years after the *Kitāb al-Sindhind* was composed by his colleague, al-Fazārī. In a history of science that he included in an astrological treatise – the earliest history of science as such to survive in Arabic – Abū Sahl specifically mentions China together with India as a region in which the ancient sciences of Babylon survived, after the depredations of Alexander of Macedon, until the time of Ardashīr and the rise to power of the Sasanid dynasty. It is clear from this text that when he writes of the ancient sciences, he is thinking primarily of astrology, his profession. It may not seem particularly remarkable to find an astrologer naming far-off countries as locales in which astrology is practiced. But, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, this passage is a direct adaptation of another, Middle Persian passage, much better known today, preserved in the fourth book of the early ninth-century Zoroastrian religious compendium, the *Dēnkard*.⁷⁶ The passage in question was composed centuries earlier in the court of the Sasanid Khusrō I (r. 531–79), describing the history of the loss and recovery of knowledge by the ancient Persians.⁷⁷ (Gutas draws on these very accounts in making the case for the revival of a Sasanian attitude toward the ancient sciences in the court of al-Manṣūr.)⁷⁸ In the Middle Persian original, however, on which Abū Sahl based his account, at times closely paraphrasing its words, there is no specific reference to China. The appearance of China in his own Arabic account, in two places, both times together with India, therefore reflects Abū Sahl's deliberate addition to an earlier account.⁷⁹ The only likely explanation for Abū Sahl's choice in adding China by name here to the Middle Persian report he is transmitting in a paraphrase is that he knew China, in connection with India, as a place in which the ancient astral sciences were pursued. This is slender evidence, but evidence nonetheless, for the awareness by a court astrologer in Baghdad, who was his father's appointed successor in al-Manṣūr's service, and for whom the *Sindhind* was brand-new, of the astral sciences cultivated around the Chinese court. The appearance of China here is unusual, and ought to have an explanation, especially as it is intrusive in Abū

76 van Bladel, "Arabic History of Science," esp. 57–62.

77 Shaki, "The Dēnkard Account," and Cantera, *Studien*, 106–13. On the date see the references in van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes*, 33, n. 44.

78 Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 36–40.

79 The Middle Persian lists *Hindōgān ud Hrōm ud abārīg-iz zamīgīhā*, "India, Rome, and other countries, too," as places where the ancient works survived. Abū Sahl ibn Nawbakht renders this with the words *ilā bilād al-Hind wa-l-Šīn fi al-kutub allatī kānat qibalahum wa-ilā al-Rūm*, "to the land of India and China *in the books that are with them*, and to Rome" (emphasis added). Gutas (*Greek Thought*, 41) also notes that this was his addition, but without further comment: "the sources name India and Byzantium, and Abū Sahl adds China" (emphasis added).

Sahl's paraphrase of another known text in which China is not named.⁸⁰ It is clear that al-Manṣūr's astrologer knew China as a site in which a recognizable and cognate form of astrology was pursued.

Indian Astral Sciences in China

What would Abū Sahl or his father Nawbakht, or the other astrologers there, have learned about their counterparts in the Tang court, perhaps having heard about them from ambassadors returning from China to the court in which they worked, or even from Chinese prisoners of war in Iraq? Above all, they would have heard that Indian astrologers and Indian astronomy were current in China, and that, from the beginning of this period and throughout the eighth century, astronomers of recognized Indian origin were employed among the Chinese officials of the Tang court's Office of Astronomical Service, the agency responsible for keeping and announcing the hours, regulating the official calendar used in government, and predicting celestial events such as eclipses, around which many important rituals of state were scheduled.⁸¹ This Office was renamed in 758 as the Bureau of Astronomy (*si tian tai* 司天臺) and presumably augmented. In 764, the astronomer Yang Jingfeng 楊景風 wrote that there were at that time three Indian families of astronomers employed in that Bureau. Modern scholars have discerned Indian names behind the Chinese

80 Later Arabic authors do not know about Chinese astrology. Ṣā'īd al-Andalusī (*Tabaqāt*, 8), who set out to list in the eleventh century all the scientific achievements of the nations, specifically excludes China from those nations in which the sciences are practiced, although he concedes to them a high expertise in handicrafts. China appears more usually in early Arabic geographies, including geographical catalogues of nations, and in a rare description by al-Mas'ūdī (*Murūj*), who knows events of recent history, such as the Huangchao 黃巢 Rebellion (874–84), because of the disruption in the silk trade by sea that it caused and the deaths of many thousands, including western Asian Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians in China, who were counted by the Chinese census, but in none of these is China described as a home of the astrological sciences derived from Babylon. Even Abū Ma'shar, who was familiar with Abū Sahl ibn Nawbakht's work in the next century, did not include the Chinese in the history of astronomy. An excerpt of a Byzantine Greek translation from *Kitāb al-Mudhākarāt bi-l-asrār* of his student Abū Sa'īd Shādhān reports: "Abū Ma'shar said that the Chaldaeans first discovered astronomy, then the Indians, then the Egyptians, then the Persians, then the Romans, then the Syrians, then the Arabs"; εἶπεν δὲ Ἀπομάσαρψ οἵτι οἱ Χαλδαῖοι πρῶτοι ἐφεῦρον τὴν ἀστρονομίαν, εἶτα οἱ Ἰνδοί, εἶτα οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι, εἶτα οἱ Πέρσαι, εἶτα οἱ Ρωμαῖοι, εἶτα οἱ Σύροι, εἶτα οἱ Σαρακηνοί. CCAG, 5.1:148 (MS Angelicus 29, f.45).

81 Sivin, "Mathematical Astronomy."

characters designating these families: *Kāśyapa, *Gautama, and *Kumāra. Traces of the work of these families dating back to the late seventh century have been noted in Chinese sources. For example, a member of the Kumāra family is credited with a work of the early eighth century that was probably a table for predicting solar eclipses.⁸² Yang Jingfeng writes that “now most use is made of the calendrical methods (*li* 曆) of Master *Gautama, together with his ‘Great Art,’ in the work which is carried out for the government.”⁸³

This Master Gautama was Gautama (Qutan) Zhuan 瞿曇譔 (712–76), whose biography is preserved in his Chinese grave inscription.⁸⁴ He was at different times the Vice-Director and then Director of the Bureau of Astronomy. Although it is clear from the inscription that Zhuan was probably culturally more Chinese than Indian, his Indian origin remained notable, especially as he came from a line of Indian astronomers working for the Tang. His father was the eminent Indian court astronomer Gautama *Siddhārtha (Qutan Xida 瞿曇悉達), a translator from Sanskrit into Chinese. The latter, whose name likely indicates Buddhist affiliation, was himself from 712–18 the Supervisor of the Directorate of Astronomy. More than anyone else, Gautama Siddhārtha appears to have made Indian astronomical methods and parameters current in the Tang court. He composed a work called *Jiuzhi Calendar* (*li*) 九執曆 finished in 718 (cited at the beginning of this paper), the title *Jiuzhi* being a literal rendering of the Sanskrit astrological term *navagraha*, “the nine seizers”: the Sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, and the two lunar nodes. Although called a “calendar” in English, a Chinese *li* was more than that, including astronomical tables that could be used to predict celestial events. *Li* have much more in common with Arabic *zīj*s than mere calendars.⁸⁵ The *Jiuzhi li* is preserved as one of 120 sections of the *Astrological Treatise of the Kaiyuan Reign-Period* (*Kaiyuan zhanjing* 開元占經), a compilation of astronomical and astrological lore, mostly from Chinese traditions, assembled by Gautama Siddhārtha himself.⁸⁶ Modern historians of science have recognized

⁸² Yabuuti, “Researches,” 8.

⁸³ Needham, *Science*, 202. Was this otherwise unknown “Great Art” a Sanskrit *siddhānta* or materials derivative of one? Yabuuti, cited by Needham (*Science*, 202d), suggested that it was a set of trigonometric tables. Now that Cullen (“Eighth Century Chinese Table”) has demonstrated that trigonometric methods of Indian origin were used to derive the then-current official calendrical system, Yabuuti’s suggestion is all the more appealing.

⁸⁴ In 764, the year in which Yang Jingfeng refers to “Master Gautama,” Zhuan had just been reinstated in his offices by the emperor in the wake of the Tibetan occupation of Chang’an (Sen, “Gautama Zhuan,” 204).

⁸⁵ Cf. the comparison between *zīj* and *li* made by Sivin, “Mathematical Astronomy,” 41.

⁸⁶ Yabuuti, “Researches,” 9.

that the *Jiuzhi li* is mainly based on known Sanskrit astronomical works, particularly the *Pañcasiddhāntikā* composed by Varāhamihira (505–87) in Ujjain in the sixth century.⁸⁷ The *Pañcasiddhāntikā*, meaning *The Work of the Five Astrological Treatises*, refers to its own sources, five earlier Sanskrit *siddhāntas* cited in the text by name. The introduction to the *Jiuzhi li* indicates the *Pañcasiddhāntikā* as its source under the name *Wutong xianren* 五通仙人, “the sage comprehending the five.”⁸⁸ Pingree compiled a substantial list of parallel passages in the Chinese work and its Sanskrit source, proving the fact.⁸⁹ The *Jiuzhi li* itself is addressed to the Tang emperor (then Xuanzong 玄宗, r. 712–56) and is presented explicitly as an “essential summary of the method” of Indian astronomy.⁹⁰ Indeed it is a summary of the mathematical methods of astronomical calculation current in the Sanskrit tradition.

At the time of the embassies from the ‘Abbāsids, the current official calendrical system was not, however, the *Jiuzhi li*, but the *Great Expansion Calendar* (*Dayan li* 大衍曆), in use from 729–62. The aforementioned Gautama Zhuan, Siddhārtha’s son, had caused a scandal in 733 when he and a colleague accused the deceased Yixing 一行 (683–727), an important Chinese Buddhist monk and renowned scientist and practicing astronomer,⁹¹ and the author of the *Great Expansion Calendar*, of plagiarizing his father’s Indic *Jiuzhi li*. As explained by Christopher Cullen, who has analyzed the mathematics underlying the *Great Expansion Calendar*, Yixing must have used trigonometric methods learned from an Indian informant when he worked out his *Calendar*.⁹² (Trigonometry was otherwise unknown in China in this period.) The accusation was dismissed by the emperor after a simplistic comparative test of the calendars’ predictive efficacy,⁹³ and the *Great Expansion Calendar* continued in use for decades, but Yang Jingfeng indicated, as mentioned, that the Indian officers of the Bureau of Astronomy, under the direction of Gautama Zhuan, were still using Indian methods in their official work in 764.⁹⁴

It is not out of the question that some of the ‘Abbāsids’ ambassadors to the Tang court spoke directly with members of one of these Indian families in the capital, but there were certainly other possible means of personal exchange

⁸⁷ Ibid., 9–10.

⁸⁸ Yano Michio in Yabuuti, “Researches,” 10.

⁸⁹ Pingree and Neugebauer, *Pañcasiddhāntikā*, 1:16.

⁹⁰ Yabuuti, “Researches,” 11.

⁹¹ Keyworth, “Yixing.”

⁹² Cullen, “Eighth Century Chinese Table.”

⁹³ Ibid., 30–2.

⁹⁴ Needham, *Science*, 202–3.

that could have had the same result. Others around the court surely knew about Indian astronomy and astrology. The clearest example is in the eminent Buddhist monk Amoghavajra (不空金剛 *Bukong Jin'gang*) (704–74). He apparently spent his childhood at Samarkand,⁹⁵ and then, after it was occupied by Qutayba ibn Muslim, migrated to China with his uncle while still a boy, became a Buddhist monk and, eventually, a tantric initiator to three Tang emperors as well as numerous other disciples, including generals and magnates.⁹⁶ By the end of his career, Amoghavajra was probably the most influential Buddhist monk in China. He was ordered by Tang emperors to conduct apotropaic rituals and purifications for the state, for which he was richly funded, and he translated and oversaw the translation of many Sanskrit works into Chinese.⁹⁷ In the time of the earlier 'Abbāsid embassies to the Tang, Amoghavajra had already served as a diplomatic envoy to India and was currently a leading Buddhist teacher among the military commanders in the western Chinese provinces of Hexi and Longyou. In the 760s and until his death on 20 June 774 – shortly before the last recorded “black-garment Arab” embassy in the reign of al-Manṣūr – he was perhaps the most important Buddhist authority in the eyes of the Tang emperors.⁹⁸ Among Amoghavajra’s many works was his *Xiuyao jing* 宿曜經 (*Treatise on the Constellations and Planets*), a translation of Indian astrological materials into Chinese finished in 759. This was written down by his disciple Sima Shiyao 司馬史瑤. As Yano Michio has shown, “almost all the topics [in the *Xiuyao jing*] are [attested] in Sanskrit texts on astrology and

95 Amoghavajra’s career as one of the most important Buddhist teachers in China means that there are detailed biographical reports about his life but that they deal with his foreign origins delicately. His father is said to have been Indian, but he was known by his mother’s surname Kang 康, which normally indicates a family origin in Samarkand. His use of the maternal name in China may be due to his arrival there following his maternal uncle, at the age of ten (Raffaello, “Study,” 133–6; Goble, “Amoghavajra,” 65, 205–8; Lehnert, “Amoghavajra,” 351). If all this is correct, he left Samarkand (or the vicinity) in about 712, when Qutayba ibn Muslim was actively campaigning beyond the Oxus. Qutayba ibn Muslim besieged Samarkand in 712 and imposed Arab domination on the local king, Ghūrak. Interestingly, An Lushan’s Sogdian father is supposed to have left Sogdia for China at about the same time, in 713. If a prosopography of such figures can be created, it may bear very interesting results. A social network analysis of the relationships between men like these, if any, could have powerful implications for the history of Sogdia and of both empires in the eighth century.

96 Goble, “Amoghavajra,” 173–221.

97 Lehnert, “Amoghavajra.”

98 For the dates, see Goble, “Amoghavajra,” 94; Petech, “Ambasciate arabe,” 630.

astronomy.”⁹⁹ It also includes extensive quotations of the *Jiuzhi li*, confirming that Gautama Siddhārtha’s earlier work was not obsolete four decades later, even if it was not the official calendar of state.¹⁰⁰ It has most often been cited on account of one passage, which remarkably lists the planetary names of the days of the seven-day week (foreign to China) in both Sogdian and Persian as well as Sanskrit, all transcribed in Chinese characters, adding that, “If you happen not to remember [the names of the days of the planetary week], then you should just ask a Sogdian, a Persian, or an Indian, all of whom know them,” 忽不記得但當問胡及波斯并五天竺人總知.¹⁰¹ Yang Jingfeng’s statement in 764, related above, about the three Indian families working in the Tang Bureau of Astronomy comes in fact from his revised version of Amoghavajra’s *Xiuyao jing*, written under the latter’s supervision.¹⁰² The two versions of the same work are transmitted together.¹⁰³

The personal connections documented between individuals in China in this period knowledgeable in Buddhism, the Indian astral sciences, and foreign languages such as Sogdian, and having experience traveling abroad, suggest that it would be difficult for Arab ambassadors to the Tang court not to be aware that Indian astronomy was cultivated there with imperial support. These are, of course, the very sort of people who would be required as translators for the Arab embassies. One has the impression, moreover, that they all knew each other in each generation. A few examples of their interconnections will suffice to show this. The monk Huichao of Silla, who wrote the account of his travels around 726 – referred to above because he happened to mention the Chinese embassy to western lands in Tukharistan – and who described the Arab occupation of Balkh, went on to become one of the five chief disciples of Amoghavajra, the great master of Buddhist rites originally from Samarkand and the translator of the astrological *Xiuyao jing*.¹⁰⁴ This would in all likelihood put the traveler Huichao in contact with many in the Tang court, too. It appears likely moreover that the well-connected Amoghavajra knew Gautama Zhuan as well, from the fact that his *Xiuyao jing* cited the work of his father’s *Jiuzhi li* extensively while the revised version of his work, by Yang Jingfeng, comments that Gautama Zhuan was the current head of the Bureau of Astronomy. Whether he really knew him or not, there was definitely a similar connec-

⁹⁹ Yano, “Hsiu-yao Ching,” 133.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 127–8, 130.

¹⁰¹ Chavannes and Pelliot, “Traité manichéen,” 171–3; Yano, “Hsiu-yao Ching,” 128.

¹⁰² Yano, “Hsiu-yao Ching,” 126.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 125.

¹⁰⁴ Goble, “Amoghavajra,” 254–5.

tion one generation before: the Indian Śubhākarasiṁha, who had arrived at Chang'an in 716/17, provided Buddhist *dhāraṇī*-texts to his Chinese audience by reciting them (apparently in Sanskrit) while a colleague translated them orally into Chinese and another wrote them down. This was a normal method of translation from Sanskrit into Chinese. In 717–18 he collaborated with two others in the translation of a Buddhist tantric text later expounded by Amoghavajra; a certain Xida (Siddhārtha) is noted as having done the translation into Chinese.¹⁰⁵ Unless we have more than one man named Xida able to translate from Sanskrit into Chinese in the same year in the same city, this must be the Qutan Xida (Gautama Siddhārtha, d. 728), who was the director of the Bureau of Astronomy from 712–18 and who translated the *Jiuzhi li* from Sanskrit materials also in 718. The monk Yixing, who authored the *Great Expansion Calendar* and who was accused of plagiarizing the *Jiuzhi li*, was likewise a collaborator in Śubhākarasiṁha's translations of tantric texts as one of those who transcribed and polished live oral translations from Śubhākarasiṁha's Sanskrit recitations.¹⁰⁶ Around the same time, in Chang'an in 719/20, Yixing requested and received tantric initiation from the foreign monk Vajrabodhi (Jin'gangzhi 金剛智, 671–741), another teacher of Indian tantric texts in China.¹⁰⁷ A few years later, this Vajrabodhi would become Amoghavajra's master. Besides making Indian astrology available in Chinese, Amoghavajra was the figure who made all of these translated esoteric Buddhist texts important among Chinese court figures, so that together Śubhākarasiṁha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra went on to be remembered as "the Three Great Masters of the Kaiyuan-period [713–41]" (*kaiyuan san dashi* 開元三大士). Regarded in later periods as the founders of esoteric Buddhism in China,¹⁰⁸ all were foreign and also, it is now clear, colleagues of the translators of Indian astronomy and astrology in China. These individuals, over a few generations, were all closely connected by imperial Tang patronage. Interest in tantric Buddhism, with its empowering magic rituals, seems to have gone hand in hand with interest not only in Indian astrology, as has been noted,¹⁰⁹ but also in the mathematical astronomy required for it. Buddhist teachers of Indian texts in China found, in effect, a paying market for such techniques and imperial patronage.

The preceding examples of interpersonal connections focuses only on scholars and their mutual acquaintance, omitting all the generals, officials, and

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 82–3.

¹⁰⁶ Keyworth, "Yixing"; Goble, "Amoghavajra," 52–3.

¹⁰⁷ Goble, "Amoghavajra," 72.

¹⁰⁸ Orzech, "Esoteric Buddhism," 273–81; Goble, "Amoghavajra," 49.

¹⁰⁹ Sørensen, "Astrology."

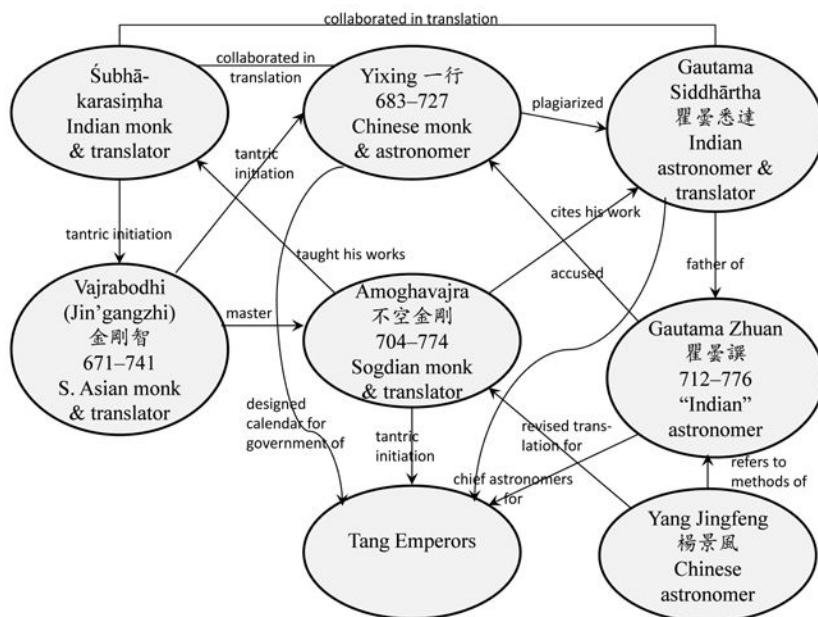


FIGURE 11.1 *Indian, Sogdian, and Chinese astronomers and monks in and around the Tang court of the eighth century.*

courtiers, some of Sogdian and Turkic extraction, who are also mentioned in Chinese sources as their patrons. The web of significant personal connections could no doubt be thickened by a scholar more familiar with Tang Chinese sources. Jonathan Skaff's recent detailed study of diplomacy in Eastern Eurasia in this very period, focusing on the borderlands between China and Inner Asia, presents ample evidence that much of the diplomatic exchange between the Tang and non-Chinese courts followed lines of personal connections in which informal, negotiated allegiances and virtual client-patron relationships were pre-eminently important.¹¹⁰ These sorts of relationships are not likely to be well documented. It is clear, however, that Chinese translations of Sanskrit astronomical and astrological works, and oral summaries of such works, were in circulation and were being used in Tang court circles, and for government purposes by the Director of the Bureau of Astronomy, at the very time in which the 'Abbāsid embassies were visiting. Eminent members of the court knowledgeable in Indian sciences were readily available. It would be strange, then, to suppose that al-Mansūr and his advisors, whose concern with the astral sciences has been indicated, had not heard that the practice of

¹¹⁰ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, especially on this point 75–104.

Indian astronomy was familiar in the Tang court and occupied an important place in the official Bureau of Astronomy. The coincidence with Abū Sahl ibn Nawbakht's unusual and deliberate reference to astrology in China, discussed above, is striking. If this is so, it must have come to al-Manṣūr's mind when he ordered the translation of Indian astronomical texts resulting in the *Sindhind*. This need not have been conscious emulation on the part of al-Manṣūr, but it can hardly be assumed that he was not concerned with modes in which power was articulated by his most powerful neighboring competitor – a country that Abū Muslim, at least, had planned to invade. The employment of astronomers using these materials by the wealthy Tang must have endowed their working methods with high prestige and value. The presence of men in al-Manṣūr's court who had converted from Buddhism, knew Buddhists, or who came from Buddhist families – most notably his friend Khālid ibn Barmak, whose father had been a Buddhist scholar who studied astrology in Kashmir and was the overseer of the monastery and stupa complex at Balkh – can only have encouraged al-Manṣūr's wish to emulate the Tang in translating Indian scientific methods.¹¹¹

The Outcome and Conclusions

It was in this meaningful context, then, that in 770/1 or 772/3, while his embassies to the Tang were still taking place every couple of years, al-Manṣūr commanded the translation of Indian materials for astronomical calculation closely related to those currently employed in China, and not those of Ptolemy, for example. This context provides one plausible explanation for why al-Manṣūr chose Indian astronomy over other possibilities. If we had to ignore this context, his choice would remain unusual if not somewhat surprising.

The result of the commission to render Indian astronomy in Arabic was the *Sindhind* system. It is possible to be quite precise about the closeness of the methods of the *Sindhind* and those used in China, because we know enough of the Arabic, Chinese, and Sanskrit astronomical works involved and the relationship of these works to each other. It has already been mentioned that the *Jiuzhi li*, composed in 718, was heavily indebted to the *Pañcasiddhāntikā* of Varāhamihira. The *Jiuzhi li* also included parameters known from the

¹¹¹ On the relationship between the 'Abbāsids and the Barmakids, which included the mothers' mutual suckling of each other's babies, see van Bladel, "Bactrian Background," 45, n. 5, 74–5.

Khaṇḍakhādyaka of Brahmagupta (wr. 665).¹¹² The trail from the same Indian source to the Arabic *Sindhind* is not much longer. The *Pañcasiddhāntikā* is the source of the eclipse limits used in the *Sindhind*,¹¹³ but more importantly it was also one of the sources for the Sanskrit *Brāhmaśphuṭasiddhānta* written in 628 in what is today Rajasthan by the influential Brahmagupta (b. 598). This *Brāhmaśphuṭasiddhānta* is the main representative of much of what Pingree was able to reconstruct of the Arabic *Sindhind* astronomy.¹¹⁴ But just as significant as any detectable specific numerical parameters held in common between the *Jiuzhi li* and the *Sindhind* system is their common inheritance of ways of ordering material and methods of calculation, such as the explanation of Indian numerals including a sign for zero, the *aharganya*-method of counting days, and other mathematical means derived from the Sanskrit tradition of astronomy.

One might ask, if al-Manṣūr and his companions were so interested in the sciences of China, why they did not import Chinese learning in general. This question would not really address the argument here. It is not that al-Manṣūr thought so highly of the Tang achievement that he would wish to import the Chinese classics and the system of education that made them classics. In just the same way, Greek texts were imported into Arabic selectively over subsequent centuries, omitting the texts and entire genres that were not of use to the audience in Baghdad. Rather it is the pre-existing interest in astrology, and the methods of astronomical calculation required to make astrology exact and persuasive, that stimulated al-Manṣūr to consider the prestigious example of the Tang court, where Indians were employed for just the service he himself required.

It is entirely possible, also, that the employment of Indian astronomers was more widespread among local Central Asian dynasties than we now know, since our sources about scholarly activity in the regions between the two empires are so limited. As possible evidence of the appreciation of Indian astronomy in Sogdia, we may note the royal paintings discovered at the site of ancient Samarkand, one depicting a teacher and a disciple between whom sits an armillary sphere. Though this painting, made around 660 in the reign of King Varkhumān of Samarkand, is very badly damaged, Frantz Grenet interprets the garb of the disciple figure as Indian in style.¹¹⁵ A scrap of evidence such as this hints at regard for Indian astral sciences among Sogdians in their homeland

¹¹² Yano Michio in Yabuuti, "Researches," 10.

¹¹³ Pingree, "History," 580–1.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Grenet, "L'Inde des astrologues."

not long before the time of the Arab conquest of the region in the early eighth century. In another case, Frantz Grenet and Georges-Jean Pinault have studied in detail a scroll on Chinese paper from Turfan, dated to the eighth or perhaps the ninth century, beautifully decorated with images of the astrological entities known as the decans.¹¹⁶ It is annotated in Kuchean (Tocharian B), showing its provenance to be probably the northern Tarim basin. Kucha was the site of one of the Chinese garrisons of the Anxi Protectorate until the rebellion broke out in 755.¹¹⁷ The images of the decans depicted here are strikingly close to those described by the important astrologer Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhi (d. 886). There must be a common source of this Kuchean scroll and the decans of the astrologer from Tukharistan, but that source remains unknown.¹¹⁸ If we take such tantalizing hints as evidence of more widespread astrological practices, derived from India, cultivated throughout Central Asia, the Tang court provides here merely the best attested, most important, and richest example of the patronage of Indian astral sciences outside of India in the eighth century, but something that residents of Khurasan may have known from their own environment, and, after promoting their candidate to the rank of caliph, have aspired to continue. If this version of the theory should prove correct, and Indian astronomy was common throughout Central Asia in the eighth century, then 'Abbāsid courtiers such as the Barmakids were in effect recipients, not merely following the example of the Tang, but along with the Tang, of a widespread culture of Indian learning. The emphasis of the explanation would accordingly shift even more to another problem still requiring further research: the social contexts that enabled the flowering of Indian astronomy in the first millennium, and its transmission by Buddhist scholars to distant countries, and likewise the conditions for the prior reception of the Greek systems of astronomy and astrology so ably demonstrated by Pingree.¹¹⁹ This transmission and its ramifications in India, while amply documented, must have been called for by specific circumstances that have not been studied in detail.

Perhaps one's judgment about al-Manṣūr's likely motive depends on how much credit one gives to the prestige of the Tang court abroad while it was

¹¹⁶ Grenet and Pinault, "Contacts."

¹¹⁷ Hansen, *Silk Road*, 87.

¹¹⁸ Grenet and Pinault, "Contacts," 1059–61. Pingree's view ("Indian Iconography," 253) that Abū Ma'shar knew it from a Middle Persian translation of a chapter from Varāhamihira's Sanskrit must be discounted.

¹¹⁹ The classic introduction is Pingree, "Astronomy and Astrology," 229–40. See further Pingree, *From Astral Omens*, 330–8. The mathematics and parameters as transmitted from Greek into Sanskrit are explained exhaustively by Pingree, "History," 533–625.

at its most powerful. But it is undeniable that there was a substantial material and diplomatic exchange between the two courts in the years preceding al-Manṣūr's order to translate methods of Indian astronomical calculation into Arabic, as the Tang had already done and were doing. In the eighth century, Tang China was a center not only for the ongoing voracious reception of Indian Buddhist texts in translation, but also for the vigorous export of Buddhist texts – to Japan, Korea, and Tibet, and even in Sogdian translation for the Sogdian communities in China.¹²⁰ The Tang example was widely copied, and astrology went along with esoteric Buddhism.

After al-Manṣūr, the elite patronage of Indian learning in Arabic translation continued with the vizier Yaḥyā ibn Khālid. When he was deposed by al-Rashīd in 803, it ceased.¹²¹ But this was a precedent for later patrons of translations from the fund of Greek sciences nearer at hand, which were apparently not readily available in the eighth century, but began to be recopied by Byzantine scribes, as manuscript evidence suggests, in the ninth – perhaps in response to the market demands created by Arabic scholars, as Gutas has suggested.¹²² The importation and recovery of Greek texts in Arabic translation would fundamentally divert early Arabic learning from the Indic and Iranian courses it had been following for one half of a century into a Hellenistic channel, from which, with respect to the secular sciences, it would not substantially turn again. The ancient Indian sciences would never again enjoy such prestige in Arabic, notwithstanding the idiosyncratic but marvelous efforts of al-Bīrūnī in the eleventh century. In China, Indian astronomy in Chinese translation from this period reached dead ends, regarded by historians of science in China as having little subsequent impact.¹²³ As the projection of Chinese power into Central Asia was curtailed by internal revolt and the rise of the Tibetan and Uighur Empires, China became much more distant to the subsequent 'Abbāsid caliphs, no longer an entity requiring the attention of annual embassies. The 'Abbāsids had troubles of their own, too, to distract them permanently from such distant countries.

I have argued before that “[t]he early reception of Sanskrit works in Arabic, however short-lived it may have been, reflects the status of Sanskrit as a language of learning in [Tukharistan].”¹²⁴ While this is true – particularly for the role

¹²⁰ Utz, *Survey*, clearly demonstrates that most extant Buddhist texts in Sogdian were translations from Chinese.

¹²¹ van Bladel, “Bactrian Background.”

¹²² Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 181–6.

¹²³ E.g., Needham, *Science*, 203.

¹²⁴ van Bladel, “Bactrian Background,” 85.

of Yahyā ibn Khālid ibn Barmak, the major sponsor of these translations – I have broadened the range of countries involved here. Much of the evidence is circumstantial, but when it is all put together, the beginnings of ‘Abbāsid patronage of scientific learning appear to owe something, among many other factors discussed at the outset, to contemporary intellectual currents from as far as China. Indian astronomy was endowed with especially high prestige by the Tang at the moment when a new Arab dynasty created its own competitive market for authoritative methods of astronomical calculation in Arabic translation in the imperial service of astrology. Circumstances for the reception of the sciences in Arabic changed greatly in the ninth century with the demise of the generation that had brought about the ‘Abbāsid revolution and who remembered a pre-Islamic Central Asia, and with the placement of the caliphs’ capital in Mesopotamia, the rise of secretaries of Aramaean origin, and the gradual loss of the easternmost provinces. But one should situate the importation of Indian learning to Baghdad in the broad context of intellectual life across eighth-century Asia. Put differently, the importation of Sanskrit learning into Arabic requires us to take the contemporary situation of Sanskrit learning into account. Significantly, the early translations from Sanskrit into Arabic were made available through living practitioners, Indian sages for hire as consultants and who themselves could recite texts that they had memorized according to the method of Indian studies. This is in contrast with the later, more widespread and acute interest in ancient Greek learning, much of which was dug up, so to speak, in manuscripts that had been long neglected, and which taught philosophical doctrines that were virtually defunct until resurrected in Arabic. Whether the latter could have happened just so without the precedent of the former is difficult to say, but it is hard to imagine that the reception of Ptolemy’s astronomy would have been so ready and rapid without astronomers in Baghdad who had already exercised themselves in the historically related methods of the *Sindhind*.

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Greek Language and Education under Early Islam¹

Maria Mavroudi

Scholarly consensus on literary contact between Greek and Arabic holds that it was mainly generated by two factors: the seventh century conquest of Byzantium's southern and eastern provinces by the Muslim Arabs (Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa) and the internal political developments in the caliphate down to the ninth century (especially the rise of the Abbasid dynasty and its legitimization into power). These produced an Arabic interest in ancient Greek learning, which resulted in the Greek-into-Arabic translation movement of the ninth and tenth centuries. Although several translators were Christians of the same variety as Byzantium, the translation movement is supposed to have been uninterested in its contemporary or near contemporary Byzantine learning, and to have been exhausted by the end of the tenth century. In addition, the beginning of a Christian literature in Arabic in the course of the ninth century (the earliest known authors of which were also Chalcedonian Christians) presumably further signaled the abandonment of Greek among Christians under Muslim rule even if they cherished it as the original language of the Gospels and an important language of Christian culture. Key in deciding the accuracy of these views is investigating under what circumstances, and until what chronological point, it was still possible to receive a Greek education in Muslim lands.

Such an investigation requires asking questions such as the following: how many users cultivated Greek, at what level, and exactly where, in the Middle

¹ The materials for the present paper are extracted from a forthcoming book, titled *Bilingualism in Greek and Arabic: Evidence from the Manuscripts*, and are submitted here in gratitude to Patricia Crone for her interest in and support of the project at various stages of its development. Earlier versions were delivered in the following venues: the workshop “Paideia and Scripture: The Transformation of Religious Knowledge in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (300–900 CE),” Institute of Advanced Studies, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (July, 2008), and History Department, Harvard University (January, 2011); Tousimis inaugural lecture, Byzantine Studies Conference and Oriental Institute, University of Chicago (November, 2011). I thank the participants in these events for valuable feedback. I also wish to acknowledge that the greatest debt incurred while working on the present paper was to the publications by three scholars with which some of its arguments disagree: Dimitri Gutas, Sidney Griffith, and Cyril Mango.

East right before the Islamic conquest? How did the situation before the conquest influence what happened after it? How did Christian institutions, including schools and their curricula, fare in the two centuries after the conquest? To what degree can one deduce that information valid for one locale (for example, Egypt) is also valid for another (Syria) during the same period? What was the variation among different Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian locales? In addition, Christian circles in the Sasanian Empire had cultivated certain aspects of Greek learning up to the Islamic conquest, but did their attitude change after it? Further, who knew Greek in Baghdad while it was the center of the Greek-into-Arabic translation movement, and how and where had they been taught, especially since in this part of the caliphate Greek had never been a local language? Some of these questions have been probed by scholarship more than others; they all are connected with larger problems of continuity and change in the Mediterranean and the Middle East and the new characteristics of social and intellectual life that could be construed as ushering in the “Middle Ages.”

As is well known, the concept of the “Middle Ages” (first articulated in the Renaissance, further developed during the European Enlightenment and still circulating today) implies a long pause in Western civilization’s triumphant ascendance.² Accordingly, during the Middle Ages, Greek literary production (the ancient phase of which is understood as a foundational part of modern Western culture) is supposed to have reached its lowest quantitative and qualitative point in the seventh to ninth centuries, a period generally deemed as one of “darkness” and “silence.” Stelios Lampakēs identified the root of this characterization to concrete statements by Gibbon and their repetition in Krumbacher’s *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur* (1897) and Vasiliev’s *Histoire de l’empire byzantin* (1932), two reference works widely consulted throughout the early and mid-twentieth century.³ Especially regarding literary history, Krumbacher was replaced only in the late 1970s by two volumes in the series *Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft*.⁴

During the last few decades, the image of the seventh to ninth centuries has improved but some of its crucial aspects, such as education and literary

² The bibliography on this topic is extensive; for a concise treatment, see Burrows, “Unmaking ‘the Middle Ages,’” outlining the emergence of a tripartite notion of world history in the context of Italian humanism, its further development in the religious confrontations of the sixteenth century, and its apogee in the eighteenth century.

³ See Lampakēs, “Παρατηρήσεις” (“Paratērēseis”), 109.

⁴ Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*; supplemented by Beck, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur* and Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*.

production, have benefited from efforts towards partial rehabilitation only.⁵ The most extensive, and unsurpassed in its depth of engagement with a dazzling array of primary sources, is Paul Lemerle's *Le premier humanisme byzantin* (1971), which examines the Byzantine revival of learning around the year 800. According to Lemerle, it was not produced by stimuli from Western Europe nor a repatriation of the "classical tradition" from the Arab world, where it had been received and assimilated – there was no need for either: from the sixth until the late eighth century urgent military concerns made the cultural apparatus of those who ran the state a matter of secondary importance, but Byzantine cultural traditions were preserved and secondary education was neither interrupted nor experienced a change in content. With some variation, school curricula corresponded to the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic or philosophy) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) as we know them from Martianus Capella, Boethius, and Cassiodorus. Paramount for the subsequent cultural efflorescence was the adoption of a new script, the minuscule, that towards the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth replaced the older script, the uncial, in the bulk of book production – an event equivalent to the invention of the printing press, according to Lemerle.

The modern perception of a low ebb in Greek literary production from the seventh to ninth centuries chronologically coincides with the Arab conquests and their aftermath and is seen as one among many symptoms of a deep crisis, manifest in all aspects of Byzantine political, military, economic, and cultural life, largely generated by the Arab conquests, which are therefore seen as catalytic in causing the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages. This, of course, is at the heart of Henri Pirenne's proposition, eloquently summarized by Hugh Kennedy almost thirty years ago:⁶

As far as Pirenne is concerned this conquest marked the final collapse of the urban, Mediterranean world of late antiquity and opened the way for the rise of the rural, agricultural powers of north-west Europe. The Arab conquest was also the end of something more ancient than the Roman Empire; since the time of Alexander, power and influence in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean had been in the hands of Greek speaking city dwellers with loyalties and contacts all over the eastern Mediterranean

⁵ Outline of earlier work and references in Farouk, "Reassessing Views." See also Parry, *Depicting the Word*; Anagnostopoulos, "Object and Symbol." The recent comprehensive treatment of the period by Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, does not really address literary and manuscript production.

⁶ Kennedy, "The Last Century of Byzantine Syria," 142.

world. Suddenly within a generation of the Prophet's death in 632, all this had vanished and nine centuries of history and culture seem to have virtually disappeared in the course of a few years. For the first time since the Achaemenids, Syria and Palestine were ruled by an Asian empire whose heartlands lay far to the east and whose administration was conducted in a Semitic vernacular by men with families and contacts in Mesopotamia, Iran and even further east.

During the last one hundred years or so, scholarly opinion on the impact of the Islamic conquest on urban life and economic activity has changed radically. In the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, under the influence of Pirenne's work, it was thought to have brought destruction and disruption. Intensified archeological exploration during the second half of the twentieth century was instrumental in reversing this thinking. The wars within the caliphate during the early Abbasid period are now deemed far more disruptive than the Islamic conquests. This revision is only now beginning to expand in order to include language and education, partly because archeology, that can speak volumes on urban development and economic activity, does not furnish easily useable data on linguistic and literary habits. Yet an argument for linguistic continuity is beginning to be made on the basis of Egyptian papyri from the early Islamic period, a kind of material also furnished by archeology and therefore deemed to offer a more direct view of language usage on the ground than conventional narrative sources.

Of course, modern discussions on language, religion, and communal identity before and after the Islamic conquests, as well as questions of political organization and fiscal administration in the early Islamic period, directly or indirectly reflect the concern of scholars with the historical experience of their own time, such as modern colonialism and the creation of modern nation states in the Middle East between the 1940s and the early 1960s.⁷ In much of

7 Syria and Lebanon gained their independence in the 1940s, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia in the 1950s, while the bloody war of Algerian independence lasted from 1954 to 1962. As pointed out by Wipszycka, "Le nationalisme a-t-il existé?", the scholarly discussions of Coptic monophysitism as a manifestation of Coptic nationalism started at the beginning of the twentieth century. They developed alongside the movement for Egyptian independence which was first declared in the 1920s, though British influence ceased only after the 1952 revolution led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. Throughout the beginning of the twentieth century, Coptic leadership generally supported Arab nationalism. To briefly present a complicated situation, the thesis of Coptic nationalism in antiquity and the Middle Ages offered historical depth to a political position that was a modern necessity. Jones' article, published in 1959, was written after independence had been won by all the aforementioned states except Algeria, where the war with France was still blazing.

the scholarship produced in the early part of the twentieth century within a colonial context, “Latin” and “Greek” can be implicitly identified as “Western,” although the Byzantine state that used them on the Southern Mediterranean shores had already been labeled, at least since the Enlightenment, as “Eastern.”⁸ The archeological exploration of the Middle East within a colonial context also emphasized its Greek and Latin past, not only because it was politically expedient (it provided a historical context within which the “Western” colonial presence could be styled a “return” to the Middle East), but also because researchers active in this field had been educated in the ancient Classics and were naturally drawn to this type of material as a matter of taste and familiarity.⁹

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, political realities have changed: our world, no longer comprised of empires, has experienced the nation state’s shortcomings but has not yet invented a viable alternative to it. Accordingly, academic engagement with ethnicity and religion as markers of communal identity within history is in search of new concepts and vocabulary and can formulate incompatible interpretations and conclusions.

An example of how twentieth-century developments influenced scholarly views on the history of the Mediterranean is provided by the early investigators of the Greco-Arabic papyri of the early Islamic period, who assumed that the conquerors were so primitive that they did not know how to govern and so had no choice but to pattern their administration after the exact model of its Roman predecessor. More recently, Islamicists and Arabic papyrologists have gone in the exact opposite direction, and discern originality, innovation, and rapid Islamization in the administrative models of the early Islamic period.¹⁰ One can read these views as metaphors, the former for the modern European criticism of pre- and post-colonial Arab regimes as administratively ineffective, and the latter as an obligation to redress the former’s arrogance out of factual as well as moral concerns. Arietta Papaconstantinou disengaged from both positions by suggesting that one does not have to decide between these two models, especially since understanding the pre- and post-conquest periods as in binary opposition to one another has kept scholars attached

8 See comments in Mavroudi, “Occult Science,” 47–56.

9 On the ideological uses of the Greco-Roman past during the time of British colonization in Egypt, see Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?*, 139–71; on the introduction of the Classics to Egypt and the Arab world as part of a larger political project of modernization, see Etman, “Translation at the Intersection of Traditions.” An analogous reception of Greco-Roman culture within a colonial context is Alexander the Great’s campaign to India as treated by British and Indian writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; see Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India*, 33–118.

10 Papaconstantinou, “Administering the Early Islamic Empire,” 57–8, outlines the change of opinion.

to the same set of questions, to which they keep recycling some of the same answers. Papaconstantinou rightly discerned that it would be more productive to investigate and describe the interaction between provincial locales and administrative centers in the early Islamic period independently of the religious or ethnic affiliation of the parties involved, and the process of administration as a dynamic one, characterized by a constant negotiation between periphery and center and between the rulers and the ruled – a pattern that has long been accepted as the norm in other fields of medieval history.¹¹

Papaconstantinou's approach to understanding the administrative system of the early Islamic period can be extended to linguistic continuity and change. Implicitly, doing so invites us to imagine practical and emotional functions of language different to the ones assigned to it by modern nation states. Some earlier investigations were eager to emphasize the continuities in content, if not in language, between Greco-Roman and early Islamic literary production and the importance of Greek literary heritage for the early Islamic period – a scholarly attitude that is nowadays frequently regarded as “orientalist,” even when it is not explicitly labeled as such.¹² Others paid attention to linguistic change and viewed religion and ethnicity as key in order to understand it. Accordingly, they insisted on the role played by Syriac and Coptic as “indigenous” languages and the “foreignness” of Greek to the Middle East. Older scholarship consistent with this model implicitly or explicitly assumed that Greek was more or less coterminous with the empire that used it as an administrative language and was therefore lost in the newly conquered territories soon after the political presence of this empire ended there. To explain the robust written record in Greek that survived from these areas, both before and after the Muslim conquests (most famously in the extensive Greek writings by John of Damascus), a sharp contrast was drawn between pro-Chalcedonian cities where Greek was spoken by the thin crust of an educated elite and rural areas inhabited by anti-Chalcedonian majorities who spoke Coptic in Egypt and Syriac in the Levant. This line of thinking views Greek as the instrument of a despised political regime that was only skin-deep and limited to the elites of urban centers.¹³ Accordingly, provincial dissensions from the religious orthodoxy espoused by the political center (in other words, late antique heresies

¹¹ Papaconstantinou, “Administering the Early Islamic Empire.”

¹² See, for example, the emphasis placed on the Greek sources for the development of Islamic medicine in Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam* (1970) and its 2002 critique by Savage-Smith, review of *Islamic Medicine*, by Manfred Ullmann.

¹³ See also the criticism by Kennedy, “The Melkite Church,” 335: “It is sometimes suggested that the Melkite church had a largely Greek-speaking hierarchy, alienated from the

that had demographically significant followings in Byzantium's Eastern provinces) were viewed as national movements in disguise.¹⁴ Further, if we assume that both the Byzantine language and the Byzantine form of Christianity were hated in the Eastern provinces, this helps explain the rapidity and permanence of the Islamic conquests.¹⁵

More recent scholarship has revealed a far more complex situation whereby language choice cannot be viewed as neatly distributed along confessional divides or rural versus urban users.¹⁶ The greater abundance of papyri in Egypt has allowed a more detailed analysis of its linguistic complexities compared with the Levant where, however, other types of primary source material can be analyzed in order to understand its linguistic situation. It therefore becomes possible to discern certain analogies between the two areas, some more obvious than others, such as the following:

By the time of the Muslim conquests in the seventh century, Greek had been spoken and written in Egypt and the Levant for approximately 1,000 years. It arrived with the armies of Alexander in the fourth century BC and received a boost during the Roman period, when it was used as the most important administrative language of Rome's Eastern provinces. During this millennium, Greek coexisted with a number of other languages, the most prominent of which, on account of the written record they produced, were Egyptian/Coptic and Aramaic/Syriac. The double names for each of the two languages implicitly acknowledge the role of dialects in shaping a literary *koinē* and a profound change in the writing system of both during the early Christian period; "Coptic" and "Syriac" can be identified as the Christian phases of the Egyptian and Aramaic languages and their respective literatures, although the earliest manifestations of the new writing systems are not exclusively linked with Christian texts.¹⁷ Further, between the early fourth and early fifth century new alphabets and written literatures emerged also for other languages spoken in the wider periphery of the Byzantine empire, such as Armenian, Georgian, and Ge'ez. Robert Hoyland argued that the creation of a Christian

majority of their congregations. It would seem that for the early Islamic period at least, this was untrue."

¹⁴ Refuted in Jones, "Ancient Heresies"; for an overview of the literature interpreting heresies as national movements, see Wipszycka, "Le nationalisme a-t-il existé?"

¹⁵ See the revision of these ideas in Moorhead, "The Monophysite Response."

¹⁶ Wilfong, "The Non-Muslim Communities," 177. On the use of Greek by rural Copts before the Arab conquest, see Clackson and Papaconstantinou, "Coptic or Greek?"; for after the conquest, see Papaconstantinou, "What Remains Behind."

¹⁷ For Coptic, see Richter, "Greek, Coptic," 412–13; for Syriac, see Brock, *Introduction to Syriac Studies*, 22.

literature in Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian at around the same time indicate a coalescence of language and Christian confession (monophysitism as opposed to Chalcedonianism) to express a limited sense of ethnic identity.¹⁸ Yet the emergence of what modern scholarship often terms as “oriental Christian” literatures may be more the result of active intervention from “above” rather than the reflection of “grassroots” sentiments: the success of new alphabets that later came to be identified as “Christian” were the result of a more aggressive expansion of Christianity – something for which translation into, and therefore a boost to, local languages was needed – aided by ruling élites in order to forward their own interests, as is clear from the involvement of the royal houses of Edessa, Aksoum, Armenia, and Georgia (and later Bulgaria, the Kievan Rus’, and Serbia) in the spread of Christianity.

The coexistence of Coptic and Syriac with Greek which, at the time of their emergence, was the dominant language in both Egypt and the Levant (with the important exception of North Syria and Mesopotamia),¹⁹ led not to the extinction but the enrichment of these two languages. This sharply contrasts with the fate of Syriac and Coptic during their coexistence with Arabic, which resulted in the abandonment of Coptic and the serious contraction of Syriac as spoken languages, a fact that scholars have remarked upon and partly sought to explain.²⁰ As for Greek, Hoyland suggested that it was eventually abandoned because “it had become intimately linked with Greek identity and with allegiance to Chalcedon and the [Byzantine] empire.”²¹ By comparison, Syriac had never been a language coterminous with a state and therefore had developed mechanisms for coping with statelessness that Greek lacked. These observations provide only a partial explanation, especially since, as Hoyland acknowledged, neither before nor after the Islamic conquest was Greek as a liturgical and theological language the exclusive province of adherents to Chalcedonian orthodoxy. In addition, Chalcedonian orthodoxy would express

¹⁸ Hoyland, “Language and Identity,” 189.

¹⁹ Richter, “Greek, Coptic,” 403, on Greek as a dominant language in Egypt. Hoyland, “Language and Identity,” 189, on the more thoroughly Hellenized Palestine, Transjordan, and S. Syria; *ibid.*, n. 26 on the lack of correlation between linguistic and confessional distribution. On Greek as the dominant written language in late antique Palestine and Arabia, particularly among Christians, who formed the demographic majority in the region during the sixth century, see Di Segni, “Greek Inscriptions,” 356.

²⁰ Richter, “Greek, Coptic,” 426; Wasserstein, “Why Did Arabic Succeed?”; Hoyland, “Language and Identity”; Papaconstantinou, “Why Did Coptic Fail?”

²¹ Hoyland, “Language and Identity,” 194.

itself in languages other than Greek, and including Syriac. In other words, linguistic usage was not neatly distributed along confessional lines.²²

Regarding why Greek empowered, rather than extinguished, the expression of local, religious, and ethnic character, Glen Bowersock suggested that Hellenism provided a far-reaching (both geographically and conceptually) shared vocabulary in which such particularities could be expressed and widely understood.²³ By the beginning of the seventh century, the coexistence of Greek with Coptic and Syriac had been shaped by the fact that Greek was not only the dominant administrative language of the Byzantine state, but also the original language of the Gospels and of the Eastern church fathers; in addition, it was the language of advanced technical literature, which included philosophy and science (especially medicine and the mathematical sciences). Its highly developed philosophical vocabulary was further honed in order to express foundational concepts of Christian theology. Coptic and Syriac were enriched through extensive translations from Greek, something that left permanent traces on their vocabulary, rhetorical expression, and overall structure of a written text.²⁴

²² On the use of Syriac by Chalcedonian Christians, see Barclay, “Melkite Orthodox Syro-Byzantine Manuscripts,” characterized by a pronounced emphasis on “indigeneity” that reflects both scholarly arguments and modern political concerns. A few concrete examples of Greek literature put at the service of Jacobite and Nestorian Christianity and of Syriac literature at the service of Chalcedonian Christianity: the Nestorian Job of Edessa (640–708) corrected the Syriac Old Testament on the basis of the Greek Septuagint; see Juckel, “Septuaginta and Peshitta,” and Salvesen, “Jacob of Edessa’s Version.” The fragment of a ninth-century Sogdian-Greek Psalter found in Boulayiq near Turfan in Chinese Turkestan gives a translation into Sogdian based on the Septuagint rather than the Peshitta; see Sims-Williams, “Greek-Sogdian Bilingual.” In the ninth century, the Nestorian Ḥunayn b. Ishāq is said to have translated the Greek Septuagint into Arabic; Griffith, “Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq,” 140. Conversely, a number of seventh- and eighth-century Syriac writers that did not adhere to Chalcedonian orthodoxy were translated from Syriac into Greek during this period. The best known among them is, perhaps, Isaac the Syrian (d. ca 700), whose writings were translated into Greek at the monastery of Mar Saba in the ninth century. Other authors include Joseph Hazzaya (whose *Letter to Patricius*, known in Greek translation, is usually attributed to Philoxenus of Mabbug, d. 523) and John of Dalyatha (early eighth century); see Brock, “The Syriac Tradition,” 199–215. To these one may add the Arabic treatise on the Eucharist written by the Nestorian physician Ibn Buṭlān at the request of the Patriarch of Constantinople Michael Kerouarios; see Mavroudi, “Licit and Illicit Divination.”

²³ Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*; Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 120.

²⁴ For the imprint of Greek on Coptic, see Richter, “Greek, Coptic”; Richter, *Rechtsemantik*; Clackson and Papaconstantinou, “Coptic or Greek?”, for Greek vocabulary in Syriac, see Schall, *Griechische Fremdwörter*.

In her analysis of why coexistence with Arabic led Coptic but not Syriac to disappearance, Papaconstantinou surveyed explanations offered in earlier literature and assessed some as more valid than others; she also pointed out that the patterns of Muslim settlement in the conquered territory and the degree to which Christians had a stake in the local economy and power structure must have played the most decisive role in their choice to use Arabic. From the tenth century onwards, when the Fatimids established their capital in Cairo and tried to emulate Baghdad, Egypt became the seat of a royal government for the first time since the Ptolemies. The Fatimids also revitalized trade. This transformed Egypt from the equivalent of a modern “exploitation colony” (characterized by a relatively small number of colonizers with little interest to share their language) to something more akin to a “settlement colony,” a pattern that leads to greater assimilation of the local population to the colonizers and indigenous language loss.²⁵ In contrast, Syria was the center of imperial power only while Damascus was capital under the Umayyads and receded to provincial backwardness when the capital was moved to Baghdad. The following brief remarks are offered as a footnote to her insightful analysis:

Coptic is thought to have been abandoned as a spoken language at around 1300,²⁶ when Syriac literature is supposed to have entered its last phase of contraction after the death of the great polymath Bar Hebraeus (1226–86).²⁷ This chronological coincidence suggests that, among the different reasons already discussed by historians for the disappearance of Coptic, one should pay further attention to the pressure exerted on the Christian populations of the Middle East as a result of the Crusades that caused the Muslim overlords to identify Christians under their rule with the outside enemy, as well as the tremendous upheaval generated by the arrival of the Mongols even in geographic areas beyond their direct control.²⁸ Further, specific military and political developments that lasted from the middle of the tenth until the end of the thirteenth century must have helped the survival of Syriac but undermined that of Coptic: the Byzantine reconquest of North Syria and part of Mesopotamia, and especially the region of Antioch, which remained under Byzantine rule for more than 100 years (969–1084) resulted in strengthening the Christian presence, both institutional and demographic, throughout this area. The Crusaders arrived in 1098, only 14 years after the end of Christian rule in Antioch, and were able to capitalize on Byzantium’s cultural and

²⁵ Papaconstantinou, “Why Did Coptic Fail?”

²⁶ Richter, “Greek, Coptic,” 417.

²⁷ Brock, *Introduction to Syriac Studies*, 13–17.

²⁸ Various reasons are surveyed in Northrup, “The Bahri Mamluk Sultanate,” 271.

demographic gains for their own benefit – a fact rarely, if at all, remembered in modern historiography.²⁹ Crusader presence in the Levant was less stable than the Byzantine one, though it lasted longer (until the fall of Acre in 1291). For all their lack of permanence, the cumulative effect of these two Christian conquests benefited local Christians under direct Byzantine and later Crusader rule and renewed the social importance of Syriac as a Christian language of the wider Levantine area.³⁰ By comparison, Coptic could only lose: the chronicle of the Chalcedonian Yahya of Antioch (d. 1066) leaves no doubt that Egyptian Christian populations became targets of aggression when the Byzantine army scored victories; the persecution of Christians under the caliph al-Hākim forced Yahya to leave his native Egypt for Byzantine-held Antioch.

Greek seems to have benefited from the Christian reconquest less than Syriac. As mentioned earlier, the area where the Byzantines made their comeback (North Syria and Mesopotamia) was the less Hellenized part of the Levant. Byzantium never recovered any part of Palestine, Transjordan, and Southern Syria, which had been more thoroughly Hellenized due to a longer period of Roman rule and the presence of the Chalcedonian patriarchate of Jerusalem that functioned as a religious and educational institution upholding the Greek language, as the evidence of hagiography, literary composition, and surviving manuscript production indicates.³¹ This may at least partly explain the Byzantine failure to firmly re-implant Greek in the region during its reconquest in the tenth and eleventh centuries – there was not enough of a Hellenized substratum upon which to build, although one may have still existed further south, where the reconquest never reached. Evidence from the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries indicates that Greek was still spoken and even cultivated at the literary level there, sometimes clearly alongside other languages. For example, Andrew, bishop of Crete, one of the great liturgical poets of the Byzantine period, was born in Damascus around 660 CE. He received a basic and more advanced education in the city of his birth about a generation after its Arab conquest. In his teens he moved to Jerusalem, where he seems to have received theological training that served him enough to participate

²⁹ See also the remarks in Mavroudi, “Occult Science,” 52–3.

³⁰ This is not to overlook the pressure exerted by the Byzantines on local populations in order to conform to Chalcedonian Christianity. But Byzantium was, in the end, obliged to rely on non-Chalcedonian Christians in order to demographically strengthen the Christian presence in the territories it had recently recovered from the Muslims. See Dagron, “Minorités ethniques.” On the renewal of West Syrian monasticism and Syriac literature as a result of the Byzantine reconquest, see Loopstra, “Patristic Selections,” 65–7.

³¹ Hoyland, “Language and Identity,” 189.

in the iconoclastic controversy in Byzantium. Significantly, Andrew's Greek hagiography, possibly written soon after the saint's death, states that he did not speak until he received communion at the age of seven, at which point he did so in a manner appropriate for his age.³² Though the text insists on the miraculous nature of this event and makes no comment on his linguistic environment, modern linguistic research knows that when several languages are spoken around young children, they may begin to speak exceedingly late displaying age appropriate expression. In *The Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas* (written by Leontios of Damascus soon after 807 and very close to the lifetime of its protagonist), we are explicitly told that Steven, born of well-off parents in a large Palestinian village in the region of Ashkelon, spoke Greek (as no doubt also Syriac and Arabic).³³ Quṣṭā b. Lūqā, one of the most important translators from Greek into Arabic in the ninth century, born in Heliopolis (Baalbek in modern-day Lebanon), is identified by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (a thirteenth-century source) as a Chalcedonian Christian (*rūmī*), further specified as "a Greek by origin" (*yūnānī aşlan*) in order to underscore that he was a native speaker of Greek.³⁴

One of the factors that helped the survival of Greek after the Muslim conquests was its use for administrative purposes, which is acknowledged by both Arabic and Greek narrative sources.³⁵ The Egyptian papyri provide a partial glimpse of how long and in what contexts such use persisted: among the published administrative documents written entirely in Greek in Muslim Egypt, the

32 Nicetas, *Vita Andreae Cretensis*, 170–1. The earliest known version of this text (rewritten multiple times in various centuries) was written by Nicetas patricius and quaestor and survives in a ninth- or early tenth-century manuscript. Scholars have debated the date of its composition and placed it between the eighth and the tenth centuries. Auzépy, "La carrière d'André de Crète," argued that Nicetas wrote Andrew's hagiography during the reign of Constantine V (741–75) a few years after the saint's death in 740.

33 Leontios, *Life of Stephen*, 6:1 (Stephen's native land); 6:3–4 (financial ability of his parents); 48:3 (Stephen speaks Greek).

34 Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *'Uyūn al-anbā'*, 1:244–5.

35 List of Arabic narrative sources in Sijpesteijn, "Multilingual Archives," 106, n. 4. In Greek, Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 431, notes the following under the year 758/9 CE: "In this year the Arabs maliciously expelled the Christians from government chanceries for a short time, but were once again obliged to entrust the same duties to them because they were unable to write numbers." The use of "Byzantine" (*rūmī*) numbers (derived from alphanumerical notation in the Greek minuscule) survived in Arabic notary usage until the beginning of the twentieth century; see Rey, "A propos de l'origine grecque des 'chiffres de Fès'."

latest *dated* one that has been published so far was written in the year 796/7.³⁶ Earlier dated specimens cover the entire eighth century.³⁷ Significantly, both proper names that are readable in the Greek document of the year 796/7 are neither Greek nor Coptic but Arabic: Rabī‘a and ‘Abd Allāh b. Ibrāhīm. Given that Greek papyri of the Islamic period are the largest unpublished portion of any collection of papyri and the area where 90 percent of the work remains to be done, the publication of this material may produce surprises. At the same time, it is important to remember that the earliest use of Arabic for administrative purposes is attested in a well-known Greek – Arabic bilingual document (*entagion*) dated to 643, the very year of Egypt's Islamic conquest, and pertains to the provisioning of the invading Muslim army.³⁸ This complicates significantly the oversimplified picture conveyed by the narrative sources of the Abbasid period (perhaps meant as a rhetorical blow to the fallen Umayyad dynasty) that suggests a straightforward transition from the chancery Greek and Persian of the Umayyads to the chancery Arabic of the early Abbasids.³⁹

Regarding Egypt, the emerging scholarly consensus is that Egyptian society functioned as bilingual in Greek and Coptic before the Islamic conquest and into the eighth century and that any dichotomy drawn between a “Greek-speaking” and a “Coptic-speaking culture” is misguided.⁴⁰ This contrasts with the earlier view that the use of written Coptic was expanded after the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 642 because it was relieved from the pressure of Greek and was aided by a slow pace of Arabization.⁴¹ The papyri make evident that the expansion of written Coptic had taken place already in the Byzantine

36 See Morelli, *Documenti greci*; the latest dated papyrus written entirely in Greek in 796/7 is P. Vindob. G 18707, *ibid.*, 111–12, no. 21 and tav. 14.

37 Morelli, *Documenti greci*, publishes 17 specimens out of the Vienna papyri collection explicitly dated in the eighth century, and several more that can be attributed to this period on the basis of paleography or other evidence.

38 This is the famous *PERF* 558 = Vindob. G 39.726, originally published by Grohmann, *Aperçu de papyrologie arabe*, 40–3, and plate 9; republication by Demiri and Römer, *Texts from the Early Islamic Period of Egypt*, 8–10; its significance for the study of Arabic dialectology in Larcher, “In Search of a Standard,” 107–9.

39 Overview of administrative linguistic practices in early Islamic Egypt in Papaconstantinou, “What Remains Behind,” 449, and Sijpesteijn, “Multilingual Archives.” It can be assumed that the administrative use of Greek ceased in Egypt some time in the ninth century; see Sijpesteijn, “Multilingual Archives,” 106.

40 Clackson and Papaconstantinou, “Coptic or Greek?,” 73; on Egyptian society as bilingual in Greek and Coptic after 642, and into the eighth century, see Cromwell, “Aristophanes Son of Johannes,” 230.

41 Wilfong, “The Non-Muslim Communities,” 177.

period: legal documents were drawn up in Coptic at least since the late sixth century, if not earlier,⁴² while the bulk of the known private correspondence in Coptic dates between the fifth and the eighth centuries.⁴³ In the eighth and ninth century, legal documents drawn up in the Coptic language in Middle and Upper Egypt would use long invocations of the Holy Trinity and dating formulas in Greek.⁴⁴ Correspondence and legal documents continued to be drawn in Coptic into the eleventh century, at least in Upper Egypt,⁴⁵ and evidence from the papyri suggests that Greek (although thought to have been abandoned as a spoken language in Egypt in the ninth century)⁴⁶ continued to be studied in Coptic-speaking environments as late as the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁴⁷ In sum, the papyri indicate that both before and after the Islamic conquest Greek was present not only in the cities but also in rural areas inhabited by non-Chalcedonian majorities.⁴⁸ Its use alongside Coptic both before and after the Islamic period was symbiotic rather than antagonistic. Further, it is possible to detect continuities rather than breaks in the use of both languages after the Muslim conquest of Egypt.

The evidence from the Levant is not nearly as abundant or extensively discussed, but suggests a linguistic situation similar to the Egyptian one. The pertinent Levantine papyri essentially consist of two corpora: the exclusively Greek finds from Petra, that date to the sixth century (and therefore are irrelevant to the post-conquest period); and the find from the rural site of Nessana, a garrison town at the desert border of the Byzantine empire, the dated documents of which span the sixth century and stop in the year 689, before the town's abandonment in the eighth century. The onomastic of the local population both before and after the Muslim conquest includes (but is not limited to) Arab names. Yet no document has been found in which the locals use the

⁴² McCoull, "Philosophy in its Social Context," 75.

⁴³ Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, 105.

⁴⁴ Clackson, and Papaconstantinou, "Coptic or Greek?," 104.

⁴⁵ Bibliographic documentation in Den Heijer, "Recent Developments."

⁴⁶ Clackson and Papaconstantinou, "Coptic or Greek?," 104.

⁴⁷ Clackson, review of *Writing, Teachers and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, by Raffaella Cribiore, 195.

⁴⁸ Wipszycka and Clackson were among the first Coptologists to deny a linguistic separation reflecting urban versus rural users and confessional affiliation. Their view is now the accepted norm in their field but still not commonplace in other disciplines that study Egypt; see Papaconstantinou, "Introduction," 7.

Arabic language, not even to address the Muslim government, which in its turn addressed the locals in both Greek and Arabic.⁴⁹

The Nessana papyri, as well as the evidence from epigraphy and incidental remarks in the narrative sources, indicate that Greek was not absent from the Levantine countryside. Yet it was mostly in the countryside that Syriac could be used in public spaces and functions.⁵⁰ Such an understanding rings true to a modern observer of languages for one additional reason: it corresponds to the use of Spanish alongside indigenous languages in Latin America today. More than 500 years after the arrival of the Conquistadores, the presence of Spanish is overwhelming in both city and countryside, yet it is mostly in the countryside where the pre-Columbian languages can be heard, written, and read.⁵¹

Modern scholars have attempted to understand what prompted the adherence of local Middle Eastern populations to Greek for some two centuries after the Islamic conquest, given that it was not, or at least has not been viewed (even after a 1,000-year presence in the area and dominance by the sixth century), as an “indigenous” language. There were two decisive factors in its persistence: its association with the Roman/Byzantine state and its importance as a vehicle for Christianity. For example, Rachel Stroumsa suggested that the inhabitants of Nessana spoke Arabic as a vernacular and used Greek not as a marker of self-identity but for its connotations of imperial power. Further, the remains of churches at several rural sites west of the Jordan indicate continuous patronage of religious buildings by a Christian elite commemorated in Greek inscriptions that begin in the late seventh and span the eighth century. The latest among them may have been written in the year 785 or 801 AD, depending on whether the date recorded, 6293, corresponds to the Byzantine or the Alexandrian era.⁵² In at least two of these rural sites, the onomastic found on the Greek inscriptions reveals a clergy with Greek and biblical names and laymen with Aramaic or Arab names.⁵³ Both before and after the Arab conquest, the well off, who could afford to be patrons of a church, clung to the

49 Wasserstein, “Why Did Arabic Succeed?,” 257–62; Stroumsa, “People and Identities in Nessana.”

50 Hoyland, “Language and Identity,” 188.

51 French, *Maya Ethnolinguistic Identity*. Needless to say, not all aspects of the linguistic situation in the late antique and early Islamic Middle East can be paralleled by the modern one in Guatemala due to the obvious absence of concepts like “nationalism” and “modernity” in a pre-industrial historical context.

52 List in Di Segni, “Greek Inscriptions,” 357–99.

53 Di Segni, “Greek Inscriptions,” 368.

long-established Hellenized culture irrespective of their ethnic origin. This is consistent with the social profile of the aforementioned St. Stephen, whose hagiographer specifies that he spoke Greek to underscore a moment of solemn clairvoyance, while he was “filled with a spirit of holiness, his face shining like the rays of the sun.”⁵⁴

Modern scholarship has also pointed out that, in the course of the eighth century, Palestine, and especially Jerusalem with its neighboring monasteries, was the center of prolific literary production in Greek, which included theological, homiletic, hagiographical, and liturgical works, as well as school textbooks.⁵⁵ This happened while the iconoclastic politics of the Byzantine state estranged Palestinian Christians. Therefore, the cultivation of Greek among them should not be imagined as generated by an emotional attachment to Byzantium; rather, it seems to have been possible while remaining attached to a local identity, as can be gathered from a few direct statements quoted in the hagiographical accounts on three saints hailing from Palestine.⁵⁶ St. Michael the Synkellos spent the first 50 years of his life (between *ca* 760 and 810) in Jerusalem, the city where he had been born and educated. His hagiographer claims that, some time after 810, Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem sent him, together with his disciples Theodore and Theophanes (known as the Graptoi brothers) to Rome to discuss the controversy of the Filioque.⁵⁷ Arriving in Constantinople around 813, he defended the veneration of the icons and spent the next 30 years of his life either in prison or exiled at a Bithynian monastery. In his Greek epistolography (as quoted by his hagiographer), he identified himself as “Persian-born” (*Persogenēs*, which in the archaizing Byzantine vocabulary of this period should be understood as Arab).⁵⁸ Likewise, the Graptoi

54 Leontios, *Life of Stephen*, 69:3.

55 Blake, “La littérature grecque en Palestine”; Mango, “Greek Culture in Palestine.”

56 This is consistent with the conclusions in Stroumsa, “People and Identities in Nessana,” and with the observation current in modern scholarship on sociolinguistics that commonplace definitions of indigenous identity are grounded in individual geographic communities rather than in ethnolinguistic ones. For a discussion and bibliography, see French, *Maya Ethnolinguistic Identity*, 65.

57 Sode, *Jerusalem*, argued that important parts of the hagiographical narratives on St. Michael Synkellos and the Graptoi brothers are fictitious, especially the information pertinent to the *Filioque* and the claim that the Graptoi were Michael’s disciples. While much of Sode’s skepticism is well placed, it does not affect the information pertaining to the Palestinian roots of these figures in the present discussion.

58 *The Life of Michael the Synkellos*, 44:16.

brothers, when questioned by emperor Theophilos, identified themselves as natives of the Moab.⁵⁹

An elite attachment to Greco-Roman Christian heritage in the eighth century can be found even beyond the Chalcedonian circles of Palestine. Papaconstantinou has analyzed the papyri from the eighth-century archive of Jēme in Western Thebes, in other words from the rural heart of Coptic Egypt, where several uprisings against the Byzantine state had erupted. Jēme was a Coptic-speaking, anti-Chalcedonian community that, more than a century after the Muslim conquest, included elite members with names such as Aristophanes, Kleonikos, Polykrates, and Athenodoros, who used Roman honorific titles, wrote legal documents entirely or partially in Greek, and also signed them in Greek. Papaconstantinou suggested that, perhaps due to its rural isolation, Jēme clung to the old ways longer than urban areas and for this reason its upper crust during the second half of the eighth century still lived, in mind and heart, in the Byzantium that their great-grandfathers had known, remembered with nostalgia rather than resentment.⁶⁰

Consistent with this interpretation, Papaconstantinou has also argued that the animosity with the Chalcedonian church and the anti-Greek, pro-Arab sentiment expressed in Coptic texts was fostered a generation or two after the Islamic conquest by the institutional representatives of the Monophysite ecclesiastical establishment in order to serve its competition with the Chalcedonian church for the favor of the Muslim conquerors.⁶¹

Hoyland briefly discussed Syriac evidence that could lead to an assessment for the Levant similar to Papaconstantinou's for Egypt, although Hoyland does not articulate such a conclusion.⁶² Contrary to the frequently repeated claim that the Syrian church welcomed the Arab invasions, Hoyland pointed out that earlier Syriac sources highlight the suffering that befell the Syrians as a result, while relief from the "cruelty of the Byzantines" is brought up by comparatively later sources, such as the West Syrian patriarch Dionysius of Tellmahre (818–45).⁶³ His lost historical work was used by key writers of a later period, such as the anonymous *Chronicle of 1234*, Michael the Syrian, and Elias of Nisibis,⁶⁴ who may echo his sentiment. For Syriac writers after the tenth century, such a sentiment was corroborated by the historical memory of

59 Symeon Metaphrastes, *Life of Theodore Grapto*, PG 116, col. 673A.

60 Papaconstantinou, "What Remains Behind."

61 Papaconstantinou, "Historiography"; eadem, "What Remains Behind," 447–8.

62 Hoyland, "Language and Identity," 193–4.

63 Ibid., 193.

64 Watt, "The Portrayal of Heraclius," 64.

Byzantium's heavy-handed treatment of non-Chalcedonian Christians in North Syria during its Byzantine reconquest. Significantly, Dionysius was writing at a time of heightened military antagonism between Byzantium and the Arabs, which routinely raised Muslim suspicion against the Christians of the caliphate. In addition, Dionysius accompanied Caliph al-Ma'mūn to Egypt while he was putting down the Christian revolt of 831 in the region of al-Bashmur in Upper Egypt. Prompted by excessive taxation, its failure resulted in massive Islamization of Egyptian Christians.⁶⁵ Since Dionysius witnessed first-hand the devastating effects of Christian opposition to Muslim rule, it is possible that his anti-Byzantine rhetoric was developed as a tool to promote pacification and accommodation, at least for Christians of his own creed. Greek played a role as a language of the Christian heritage in Coptic- and Syriac-speaking environments both before and after the Muslim conquests. Surviving ostraca and book manuscripts indicate that in every part of Egypt and in every era parts of the liturgy of the Coptic church were recited in Greek.⁶⁶ In addition, at least until the seventh century, liturgical hymns found within a Coptic linguistic context are, in their majority, Greek.⁶⁷ The fact that Greek was embedded in the Coptic liturgy led to the creation of several bilingual (Greek and Coptic) biblical manuscripts. Most of them were copied between the sixth and the tenth centuries, which indicates that Egypt's Arab conquest did not diminish the rate of their production.⁶⁸ Overall, bilingual manuscripts were copied between the fifth and the thirteenth centuries, and contained either full texts or lectionaries. This indicates the need of congregations to have access to a Greek text in addition to the Coptic one. The most frequently copied biblical book in these bilingual manuscripts is the Psalter, which is also the most frequently copied Greek text in bilingual Greek-Coptic exercises found in papyri and ostraca,⁶⁹ as well as the text with which the beginnings of literacy could be obtained by a Christian in any language throughout the Middle Ages. This suggests that speakers of Coptic started (and perhaps in many cases also stopped) their Greek education with the Psalter, both before and considerably after 642.

What these Greek and Coptic bilingual manuscripts can tell us about the use of Greek in Coptic-speaking environments has not been fully mined by

65 Swanson, *Coptic Papacy*, 33.

66 On Greek in the Coptic liturgy, see Wipszycka, "Le nationalisme a-t-il existé?", 106. Boud'hors, "Toujours honneur au grec?", 180; the practice continues in the Coptic church today.

67 Boud'hors, "Toujours honneur au grec?", 181.

68 Criboire, "Greek and Coptic Education," 283.

69 Ibid., 282.

modern scholarship and only some preliminary remarks, framing questions rather than providing answers, can be offered here on the basis of limited examples. The surviving fragment of a ninth-century Coptic-Greek lectionary suggests a scribe who approached Greek very much through the lens of Coptic: the Greek is written in Coptic characters and accented according to Coptic conventions; its poor orthography includes mistakes conventional for a Greek text written by a native speaker of Coptic (e.g., abundant iotaisms, ΚΕΓΡΑΙΤΕ for ΓΕΓΡΑΙΤΑΙ).⁷⁰ This situation contrasts with eighth-century scribal practices evident in the Greek and Coptic documents from the aforementioned archive of Jēme, where at least some scribes knew the conventions of their contemporary Greek handwriting and consciously differentiated their penmanship in each language.⁷¹ It also contrasts with the fluent sloping Greek uncial in the fourteenth-century liturgical fragments from the monastery of St. Makarios in the Nitrian Desert that contain the Greek text of the Egyptian Anaphoras by St. Basil and St. Gregory. They were executed by two different scribes, one of whom was more accomplished than the other, both in the penmanship and the spelling of Greek.⁷²

Although they can be securely dated between 1327 and 1339 because they include the name of the reigning patriarch, the script imitates Greek uncial manuscripts from the ninth and tenth centuries and suggests an effort to reproduce the physical appearance of venerably old liturgical manuscripts preserved in the fourteenth century. It seems reasonable to attribute such differences to the level of competence of each individual scribe rather than to fluctuations in Coptic interest in access to Greek. Anne Boud'hors observed that in bilingual Greek-Coptic manuscripts through the centuries, the Coptic text does not appear to be a direct translation of the Greek version it accompanies but is based on a different Vorlage of the same text.⁷³ This, according

⁷⁰ Oxford, Bodleian library, ms Gr. Liturgy. C. 1 (s.c. 30051), reproduced (Greek part only) in Wilson, *Mediaeval Greek Bookhands*, plate 6. The “circumflexes” in lines 11 and 17 that puzzle Wilson are Coptic accents, which are not consistently marked in the Greek text, evidently because neither Coptic nor Greek manuscripts mark them regularly at the time. For a list of mistakes likely for a native speaker of Coptic when writing Greek, see Clackson and Papaconstantinou, “Coptic or Greek?,” 80, and comments by Boud'hors, “Toujours honneur au grec?,” 187.

⁷¹ Cromwell, “Aristophanes Son of Johannes,” 232. On different languages using the same alphabet but written in different handwriting styles, see Papaconstantinou, “Introduction,” 10–12.

⁷² Evelyn-White, *Monasteries of the Wâdi 'n Natrûn*, 2:200–13, and plate xxi.

⁷³ Boud'hors, “Toujours honneur au grec?,” 187.

to Boud'hors, must be considered evidence of a fossilization of Greek.⁷⁴ On the other hand, one should not underestimate the fact that translation of a biblical text is a major editorial and interpretative exercise requiring manuscript research and deep knowledge not only of the two languages involved, but also of biblical exegesis. The painstaking approach of Abū al-Faraj Hibat Allāh Ibn al-‘Assāl to translating the Gospels into Arabic in the thirteenth century indicates as much.⁷⁵ As for the discordant Greek and Coptic versions, they suggest knowledge of Greek active enough to at least identify the corresponding passages. Further, the prolific Coptic philological activity of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries generated interest in the Greek version of biblical texts, stimulated the compilation of Coptic-Greek-Arabic glossaries, and must have inspired the Greek liturgical manuscript from St. Makarios. This suggests that the serious study of Coptic included engagement with Greek,⁷⁶ and provides the key to interpreting the otherwise puzzling and seemingly unreliable statement of al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442) in his account of the monasteries of Asyut in Upper Egypt that the monks there knew Greek and Coptic.⁷⁷ At least one Coptic intellectual living later than al-Maqrīzī, the hymnographer Sarkīs (Sergius, d. 1492) studied Greek and contributed to the hymnography of his church in this language.⁷⁸

Syriac liturgical manuscripts exhibit an equivalent engagement with Greek. It appears that whole sections of the Syriac liturgy in the late antique period were performed in Greek because a small number of later Syriac liturgical manuscripts, including a published one from the tenth century, preserve Greek passages written in Syriac characters.⁷⁹ The Chalcedonian liturgy in Edessa around 723 CE was celebrated in both Greek and Syriac.⁸⁰ As in the case of Coptic, studying Greek became part and parcel of an in-depth understanding of Syriac language and literature. This explains why, for example, Jacob of Edessa (fl. ca 700) was acutely conscious of his own Syriac heritage and, at the same time, one of the best Hellenists that Syriac culture ever produced;⁸¹ and

⁷⁴ Richter, “Greek, Coptic,” 434, also calls the use of Greek in highly ritualized situations within Coptic a “folklorization.”

⁷⁵ Macdonald, “Arabic Version of the Gospels”; Bailey, “Hibat Allāh Ibn al-‘Assāl.”

⁷⁶ This philological activity and the role of Greek within it have not been properly researched yet; see Sidarus, “*Essai sur l’âge d’or*.”

⁷⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭāṭ*, 4:2:1045. Clackson and Papaconstantinou, “Coptic or Greek?,” 104, dismisses al-Maqrīzī; see also Wiet, “*Ḳibṭ*,” *ER*¹.

⁷⁸ See Farouk, “Byzantine Influences on Coptic Hymnography.”

⁷⁹ Brock, “Greek and Syriac,” 614; Sauget, “*Vestiges d’une célébration gréco-syriaque*.”

⁸⁰ Tannous, “Syria Between Byzantium and Islam,” 359.

⁸¹ Van Rompay, “Past and Present Perceptions,” 81.

why Syriac schools in the eighth century introduced students to Aristotle by teaching them to read the Greek text and translate it into Syriac.⁸² At the lower end of the educational spectrum, a Greek-Syriac-Arabic Psalter of the ninth century may have been used as an aid for basic trilingual education.⁸³ Words of Greek origin constituted an important percentage of Syriac vocabulary, which fluctuated through the centuries depending on the exposure of Syriac authors to Greek as a result of the political and social realities of each era. For example, given that the sixth and seventh centuries are the golden period of Syriac literature and especially of translations from Greek, a rich Greek vocabulary can be found in original Syriac compositions, both before and after the Islamic conquest.⁸⁴ The Byzantine reconquest of North Syria in the tenth and eleventh centuries led to renewed contact between the two languages and an increase of the Greek vocabulary in Syriac literature, an effect still felt in Syriac prose of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Overall, from the ninth until the thirteenth centuries, authors who wanted to display their erudition preferred to use Greek instead of established Syriac terms.⁸⁵

The introduction of Arabic for the composition of Christian apologetic texts by Coptic and Melkite authors is generally taken as a sign that Coptic and Greek are beginning to die out, although the modern survival of Syriac at various Middle Eastern locales has largely kept scholars from making the same argument when Maronite, Jacobite, or Nestorian authors take up Arabic instead of Syriac.⁸⁶ Yet Papaconstantinou argued that the literary production by Sāwīrus b. al-Muqaffa‘ (*ca* 915–87), the earliest Copt known to have composed Christian theological works in Arabic, need not indicate that the Coptic language was moribund at that time. Rather, it may reflect the social success that Coptic hierarchs and intellectuals enjoyed at the Fatimid court and their integration to the power structures of Muslim Egypt.⁸⁷ Further, it has been suggested that Sāwīrus b. al-Muqaffa‘ wrote in Arabic not in order to prevent Christians who could no longer read Coptic from converting to Islam but to introduce Christian arguments to the discussions of Muslim scholars in terms that they could understand by using arguments drawn from the Qur’ān. An additional indication that Sāwīrus chose to write in Arabic in order to engage readers beyond his co-religionists is that its use enabled him to participate in

⁸² Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 147.

⁸³ Pigulevskaya, “Треко-сиро-арабская рукопись.”

⁸⁴ Brock, “Greek and Syriac,” 611.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Pointed out by Papaconstantinou, “‘They Shall Speak the Arabic Language,’” 283.

⁸⁷ Papaconstantinou, “‘They Shall Speak the Arabic Language.’”

the public religious debates between Muslims, Jews, and Christians of various denominations that were stimulated by the Fatimid court, especially under the caliph al-Mu‘izz (969–75).⁸⁸

Compared with Egypt, Christianity in the Levant seems to have turned to Arabic two centuries earlier, already in the middle of the eighth century. The earliest known Christian Arabic texts were produced in Chalcedonian circles and include an anonymous *apologia* most likely written some time after the year 755 and some, but not all, of the treatises by Theodore Abū Qurrah, bishop of Ḥarrān (*ca* 750–*ca* 823), the earliest Christian author writing in Arabic whose name we know.⁸⁹ Scholars focusing on Christian Arabic literature consider this as evidence for the abandonment of Greek and the adoption of Arabic by “Melkite” Christians. From the point of view of a Byzantinist, such an interpretation presents a paradox, because of the vibrancy of Greek literary production from Palestine during the eighth and early ninth century.⁹⁰ Further, since Abū Qurrah knew Greek well (he wrote some of his treatises in this language and prepared the Arabic translation of a pseudo-Aristotelian work)⁹¹ it is unlikely that he chose to write in Arabic because it was the only language he could use well.

In a recent essay, Sidney Griffith briefly surveyed the “Melkite” Christian literature from the seventh to the ninth centuries, both in Greek and in Arabic, and showed that its arguments constitute responses to Muslim accusations of polytheism, many of which are articulated in the Qur’ān itself. These accusations were generated by misunderstandings regarding a number of Christological questions, some of which were also the object of discussion between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches.⁹² According to Griffith, Melkite Christian authors of the eighth and ninth centuries writing in Arabic primarily addressed their own arabophone community in order to clarify how their confession differed from the other Christian confessions under Muslim rule and supply arguments that would help them reject invitations to convert to Islam. A side effect of their primary concern to address

⁸⁸ Richter, “Greek, Coptic,” 418; Den Heijer, “Recent Developments,” 53–4.

⁸⁹ The possible dates of the earliest Arabic Christian *apologia* for Christianity from ms Sinai ar. 154 are outlined in Monferrer-Sala, “Earliest Christian Arabic Apology,” 195. More such texts appear to have been in circulation during the eighth century, as is evident from the fragments in Heidelberg Papyrus Schott-Reinhart 438; see Swanson, “Christian Arabic Disputation.”

⁹⁰ Blake, “La littérature grecque en Palestine”; Mango, “Greek Culture in Palestine.”

⁹¹ Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, xii–xviii.

⁹² Griffith, “The Melkites and the Muslims.”

their own community was that they generated the responses of Muslim authors, as well.⁹³ If we reverse these suppositions, the simultaneous cultivation of both Greek and Arabic in the Christian communities of Palestine in the eighth and ninth centuries becomes understandable. In other words, Melkite Christians in Palestine may have used both Greek and Arabic, depending on who the intended readers of various texts were. It seems that Greek was preferred when the targeted readers were other Christians of the same or other creeds, not only within Muslim lands but also beyond. This is suggested by the decision of Thomas, patriarch of Jerusalem, to send to the Armenians the Greek translation of a treatise by Theodore Abū Qurrah originally written in Arabic and apparently rendered in Greek for this specific purpose.⁹⁴ Arabic must have been chosen when an author's purpose was to primarily address Muslims – or to provide guidance on how Christian readers could defend themselves in debates with Muslims, expected to be conducted in Arabic. This is why Christian Arabic treatises support the truths of the Christian religion by citing verses from the Qur'ān and adjusting them to the requirements of a Christian interpretation. Some of the earliest Arabic Christian texts treating theological subjects, such as the correspondence between Abū Īsā b. al-Munajjim, Qusṭā b. Lūqā and Ḥunayn b. Ishāq, are self-avowedly Christian apologies addressed to Muslim readers.⁹⁵ Even Christian Arabic apologies that do not explicitly identify their addressees, such as the writings of Abū Qurrah, received multiple responses by Muslim authors.⁹⁶

The introduction of Arabic for Christian apologetics cannot be interpreted as indicating the abandonment of high-style technical Greek for an additional reason, one still related to the administrative needs of the Muslim empire. Towards the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth, as Greek receded from the administrative record, a new incentive to keep learning it well appeared: the Greek-into-Arabic translation movement, the products of which, at least to some patrons, were worth their weight in gold. We are told, for example, that the Banū Mūsā, three brothers whose father had been astrolabe maker to caliph al-Ma'mūn and who themselves were members of the caliphal entourage, would pay 500 gold dinars a month for translation. This corresponds to 75 ounces of pure gold and in today's prices (approximately 1,390 dollars per ounce) to around 100,000 dollars a month. Four times as much per month

93 Griffith, "The Melkites and the Muslims," 425.

94 Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, xvi. Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine," 155.

95 Griffith, *Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq*, 141–2.

96 Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, xvii.

was paid for scribes and translators by Muḥammad b. Abd al-Malik al-Zayyāt (d. 847), an ethnic Persian who served as vizier to three caliphs.⁹⁷

The frequently quoted letter of the Nestorian patriarch Timothy I (r. 780–823) on the translation of Aristotle's *Topics* from Syriac into Arabic at the request of the caliph al-Mahdī makes clear that a rival team was trying to deliver the same project out of the Greek original, but the caliph preferred the results of the team working out of Syriac.⁹⁸ This suggests that competition between translators from Greek and from Syriac, and in general groups or individuals who could undertake such translations, began very early on in the translation movement. It must have been fierce because the financial stakes were high. In addition, the Muslims systematically appropriated Greek learning in response to dynastic and social concerns internal to the caliphate at a time of heightened military antagonism with Byzantium in which they found themselves on the defensive. While Byzantine armies threatened Syria, Baghdādī society and the caliphal court engaged in appropriating knowledge originally recorded in the language of the enemy. As Dimitri Gutas explained, these circumstances generated what he has aptly termed "anti-Byzantinism expressed as phil-Hellenism."⁹⁹ It was in the best interests of both non-Chalcedonian Christian translators and Muslim patrons to dissociate Byzantium from Greek heritage. For example, Syriac-speaking Iranian Christians, like the members of the Bukhtishū' family, who hailed from the city of Jundishāpūr and were wealthy and influential court physicians, had a vested interest in claiming the Greek heritage for themselves. Accordingly, Muslim bio-bibliographers, who depend on apologetically tinged Christian sources of the ninth century, speak in glowing terms about an unbroken Hippocratic tradition of medical teaching and practice at Jundishāpūr since the city's foundation by Shāpūr I, although earlier Christian sources on the pre-Islamic history of Nestorianism say nothing about a medical establishment of any kind there.¹⁰⁰

In addition, a number of medieval Arabic Muslim sources claim that, towards the end of Byzantine rule in Egypt, medical teaching was almost lost in Alexandria due to the indifference of the Christian emperors. This state of emergency necessitated the compilation of the collection of medical texts known as the *Summaria Alexandrinorum*. Medical teaching was revived by

97 Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 138; Hoyland, "Language and Identity," 195. I based these calculations on Gutas' estimate that 500 dinars corresponded to approximately 25,000 dollars around 1997.

98 Hoyland, "Language and Identity," 194–5.

99 Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 83–95.

100 Richter-Bernburg, "Boktišū'," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

'Umar, Alexandria's conqueror, and was later transferred to Antioch, Harrān, and ultimately Baghdad, where it received a new lease of life due to al-Ma'mūn's royal patronage. This narrative was prolifically repeated by subsequent authors for centuries and was shown to be fictitious by modern scholarship.¹⁰¹ These invented stories imply that Byzantium could not lay claim to pagan Greek learning because Christianity was inimical to it and had forced its extinction. The true heirs to pagan Greek heritage were the Muslims because they cultivated and cherished it.

The medieval Arabic claims about the extinction of the "classical tradition" in Byzantium fit well with the older impression of modern scholarship that between the seventh and the ninth centuries whatever remained of Byzantium's cultural production was oriented towards "religious" and excluded "secular" subjects, which were largely identified with the study of the pagan "classics."¹⁰² Cyril Mango, seeking to explain the ninth-century efflorescence after such drought, argued that "the most active center of Greek culture in the eighth century lay in Palestine" and that the Palestinians who were given financial support and appointments in Byzantium made an important contribution to its ninth-century revival.¹⁰³ The idea that the late ninth-century cultural revival in Byzantium was the result of Byzantine contact with ancient Greek learning in the caliphate and of the re-appropriating it from there after it had been lost in Byzantium, was further revisited by Gutas by postulating a more direct input from Baghdād.¹⁰⁴ Gutas drew up a list of texts translated from Greek into Arabic as a result of the translation movement and showed that it closely corresponds to the body of Greek texts chosen for transliteration from uncial to minuscule at the time of the Byzantine revival. The idea to compare this kind of evidence is brilliant, but one should be careful as to its interpretation. Gutas deduced that interest in them in Byzantium was generated because of a pre-existing interest for the same texts in the caliphate. Yet this very evidence also allows for the exact opposite conclusion: that the Arabs became interested in these texts because the Byzantines were already studying them. For the time being, the only secure conclusion we can draw is that both the Byzantines and the Arabs at around the ninth and tenth centuries were interested in more or less the same texts. Deciding whether this also indicates a repatriation of ancient Greek learning from the caliphate to Byzantium depends on whether we view the iconoclastic period as dark or

¹⁰¹ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 90–5.

¹⁰² Lampakēs, "Παρατηρήσεις" ("Paratērēseis").

¹⁰³ Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine," 149 and 160.

¹⁰⁴ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 175–86.

can accept that Greek literature and education in Byzantium before the end of the ninth century was doing as well as always and was able to radiate beyond Byzantium's borders, without disruption from the iconoclastic controversy. In at least one case, it is possible to reverse Gutas' assumption that Byzantine interest in Ptolemy's *Almagest* was sparked by its circulation in the Islamic world and show that its study in Byzantium is simultaneous with, if not earlier than, its earliest Arabic translation: the two earliest known Greek manuscripts of the *Almagest*, mss *Vat. gr. 1291* and *Leidensis B.P.G. 78*, are assumed by Gutas to be the earliest available indication of Byzantine astronomical activity after the end of antiquity and to post-date the earliest known Arabic translation (before 805) because they were long thought to have been produced between 813 and 820. However, the *Leidensis* contains marginal notes with astronomical material dateable between 775 and 797/8.¹⁰⁵ As for the Vatican Ptolemy, it is now clear that, if it was not copied during the reign of Constantine V (741–75), it must have been based on an exemplar that was.¹⁰⁶ Further, a fourteenth-century Arabic work (evidently based on earlier sources) suggests that Greek manuscripts on the sciences could be easily procured during the third quarter of the eighth century and still within the first phase of iconoclasm: a passage in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* indicates that caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–75) asked the Byzantine emperor to send him books on the mathematical sciences and received Euclid and a number of works on physics in response.¹⁰⁷

True, the surviving Greek manuscripts written between the seventh and the ninth centuries are extremely few. If we count Greek manuscripts written in uncial (the kind of script prevalent before the year 800) that survive in libraries without including the papyri, we can find only 24 uncial parchment manuscripts of which a substantial portion remains, and 84 fragments of classical

¹⁰⁵ On this and further evidence that the study of astronomy was uninterrupted in Byzantium from the seventh into the early ninth century, see Tihon, "L'astronomie à Byzance à l'époque iconoclaste," 192–3; Mavroudi, "Translations from Greek into Latin and Arabic."

¹⁰⁶ Wright, "The Date of the Vatican Illuminated Handy Tables," argued that it was copied during the reign of Constantine V. More recently, Janz, "The Scribes and the Date of the *Vat. gr. 1291*," 167, suggested that it was copied shortly after the reign of Nikephorus I (802–11) out of an exemplar that listed Byzantine regnal years up to Constantine V. It is reasonable to deduce that such an exemplar would have been copied during Constantine V's reign. I am grateful to Paul Magdalino for bringing Janz's article to my attention.

¹⁰⁷ See El-Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, 196, for a discussion of the passage's reliance on earlier sources and its incompatibility with Ibn Khaldūn's assertion that the sciences were dead in Byzantium.

and scriptural texts.¹⁰⁸ By comparison, surviving Syriac manuscript production is significantly more abundant: we have approximately 330 Syriac manuscripts from before the beginning of the ninth century, dated either colophonically or paleographically.¹⁰⁹ In a 2004 article, Sebastian Brock discussed that the overwhelming majority of Syriac manuscripts dated before the year 1000 come from the monastery of the Syrians in the Nitrian Desert. Many appear to have belonged to the group of 250 manuscripts that the monastery's abbot, Moses of Nisibis, collected after a five-year stay in Baghdad and deposited at his monastery in the year 932. Brock emphasized that our picture of Syriac literature would have been very different without Moses of Nisibis, because a high proportion of the manuscripts he collected belong to the seventh century or earlier. Many of the texts they contain would not have survived without him, not only because the desert's dry climate was a decisive factor in the preservation of his collection, but also because there was a break in the choice of texts selected for copying around the end of the ninth century. This means that for a number of texts currently considered key for Syriac literature the manuscripts of Moses are either the most complete or the only witnesses.¹¹⁰

The outline of the picture drawn for Syriac literature and manuscript preservation holds true also for its Greek counterpart, except that no choice collection of early manuscripts collected in Constantinople seems to have been deposited to the library of St. Catherine's on Mount Sinai (the Greek equivalent to the Nitrian Desert) in the course of the tenth century. As a result, what we have of Greek literature written prior to the tenth century is largely what was selected for copying towards the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century. Greek manuscript production prior to this date is minimally represented by what survives, especially since it also coincides with the

¹⁰⁸ Mango, "Patrons and Scribes," 9, n. 1, with numbers for Greek derived from Devreesse, *Introduction à l'étude des manuscrits grecs*, 24–6. These numbers must be revised upwards to take into consideration the 1975 Sinai finds inventoried in Nikolopoulos, *Tanēa eurēmata*, by at least 18 uncial manuscripts that the inventory dates to the eighth century or before; it is more than doubled if we add all uncial manuscripts from the find, the vast majority of which the catalog dates to the ninth and tenth centuries, i.e., after the introduction to the minuscule. Although the study of individual manuscripts from the find that could help resolve such questions has not progressed enough, the immense difference that this accident of survival can make for our knowledge of Greek paleography and book production is evident.

¹⁰⁹ Collected by Mango, "Patrons and Scribes," which specifies that 262 are dated paleographically (*ibid.*, 9, n. 1). On the lack of Greek manuscripts before the ninth century, see Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme* (Greek), 73–4.

¹¹⁰ Brock, "Without Mushe of Nisibis."

important change in the physical appearance and format of Greek books signaled by Lemerle, namely the switch of the script from uncial to minuscule, which, prior to the late eighth or early ninth century, was reserved for administrative and archival documents and generally appears not to have been used for copying books. As a result, the selection of older literature chosen for copying towards the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century in Greek is largely reproduced in manuscripts in the minuscule.

Clearly, the translators from Greek into Arabic had at their disposal both kinds of books: Ḥunayn b. Ishāq criticizes Yahya b. al-Bitrīq, one of the minor translators of the ninth century who was a “Latīni” (that is, of North African – or, perhaps, Italian? – descent) for knowing “only the language of the Byzantines of today and its writing (*lughat al-rūm al-yawm wa-kitābatahā*) and these are the connected letters (*al-hurūf al-muttaṣila*, i.e., a cursive script), not the old Greek individual characters” (*al-munfaṣila al-yūnānīya al-qadīma*).¹¹¹ The comment (which cannot be analyzed for all it may reveal within the confines of the present paper) may suggest that Yahya b. al-Bitrīq’s training in the Greek language and script was meant as preparation for an administrative career in which only the cursive would have been needed, but the changes in the administrative apparatus of the caliphate may have forced him to pursue a career as translator. It also indicates that the translators were aware of their contemporary scribal practices in Greek and, by implication, must have been informed of texts circulating and read in Byzantium. This corroborates reports like Ibn Khaldūn’s about the procurement of Greek manuscripts from Byzantium, which should not be read as rhetorical depictions of Muslim superiority (“we demanded and the Christians had to comply”) but as having a firm foundation in reality (manuscripts of ancient Greek and Byzantine authors were numerous enough in eighth-century Byzantium that many could be diverted to the caliphate). In other words, the Greek-into-Arabic translators and their patrons did not have to rely on Greek manuscripts produced before the Muslim conquests and preserved in monastic outposts under Muslim control but had access to their contemporary world of Byzantine learning.¹¹²

More than 40 years ago, Lemerle highlighted evidence for the continuity of Byzantine intellectual and educational traditions between the seventh and the early ninth century within the Byzantine empire. This paper surveyed evidence from Egypt and the Levant indicating a continuous engagement with the

¹¹¹ Ibn Abi Uṣaybi‘a, *‘Uyūn al-anbā’*, 1:205.

¹¹² For evidence that the Muslim world was in dialogue with its contemporary eighth- and ninth-century Byzantine science, see Mavroudi, “The Naples Dioscorides,” and Mavroudi, “Translations from Greek into Latin and Arabic.”

Greek language and its attendant administrative, biblical, liturgical, and patristic usage before the Islamic conquests and up to 300 years later. Though what survives does not yield a complete picture of how Greek may have been taught at different parts of the Muslim empire at different times, we have enough to suggest that, wherever the study of Greek continued in Muslim lands, it was pursued through roughly the same curricula that were in place before the Islamic conquest. This means that Christian schoolboys in the Muslim lands and Byzantine schoolboys received similar educations and, if they grew up to be fully fledged intellectuals, they could use many of the same authors (both pagan, like Aristotle, and Christian, like the Greek Fathers of the Church) as shared points of reference.¹¹³

For example, we know that the beginnings of literacy in Greek and Coptic were acquired with the help of the Psalter and collections of wisdom literature, such as Menander's *Sententiae*, the maxims of which also furnished topics treated by the students in rhetorical exercises, both before and after the Muslim conquest.¹¹⁴ Wisdom literature must have also played a role in beginning education in the cultural periphery of the late antique Greco-Roman world, as is evident from the choice of the *Proverbs of Solomon* as the first book to be translated into Armenian after the invention of the Armenian alphabet.¹¹⁵ The taste for it is evident in the course of the ninth century among Constantinopolitan authors, including the female poet Kassia.¹¹⁶

During the second half of the ninth century, the physician Romanos, later consecrated as Jacobite patriarch under the name Theodosios in the year 887, translated from Greek into Syriac a collection of 112 verses attributed to Pythagoras.¹¹⁷ Also in the ninth century, a version of the Greek *Sententiae* by

¹¹³ On the curricula of Christian schools of different confessions in the early Islamic period and the fact that, especially at the lower levels of education, their readings and practices were interchangeable and essentially corresponded to Byzantine school practice from before the Muslim conquest, see Tannous, "Syria between Byzantium and Islam," 320–40.

¹¹⁴ Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 199–200. On wisdom literature, its role in Greek and Coptic education, and its afterlife in Arabic literature, see Mavroudi, "Two Ostraka."

¹¹⁵ Thomson, "Mesrop Maštoc."

¹¹⁶ Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 241–3, 253–70.

¹¹⁷ Chabot, *Littérature syriaque*, 95, explicitly asserts that this is a translation from Greek; Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, 280, presents it as a commentary in the form of a letter to a certain Gregory marking Romanos-Theodosios' interest in "popular philosophy." One is struck by the coincidence of two Syriac authors by the name Theodosios interested in Greek wisdom literature. Given that Pythagoras, Menander, and Gregory of Nazianzus are all considered authors of this genre, it is possible that two Theodosii and their respective works are either identical or versions of the same collection.

Menander was translated from Greek into Arabic; its maxims (attributed to Homer) can be found in a number of Arabic texts composed between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries. Yet another version of Menander's *Sententiae* survives in a single Arabic manuscript, which attributes them to Gregory of Nazianzus.¹¹⁸

A staple of a Greek literary education at its beginning stages was Homer.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, a copy of the *Iliad* and a commentary on it were part of the sixth-century library of Dioscoros from Aphrodito. The Coptic-speaking inhabitants of the rural monastery of Epiphanios at Thebes were also copying excerpts of Homer in the late sixth century.¹²⁰ During the eighth century, Theophilos of Edessa translated the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* into Syriac.¹²¹ The translation does not survive and we know nothing about its context, but it may have served not only the beginnings of studying Homer as part of learning Greek, but also as a guide to a Neoplatonist allegorical reading, following a philosophical tradition established in late antiquity. Significantly, one of the only two uncial fragments of Homer that survive outside the world of papyri was palimpsested around the year 800 in the monastery of Qarthamūn in order to copy a Syriac translation of the Monophysite theologian Severus of Antioch.¹²² Given that the instruction of Greek continued in Syriac schools during the eighth century, Homer may have ended up as scrap paper because of falling apart from frequent consultation, not because of being irrelevant to the needs of monks. Further, 13 leaves from the monastery of St. Catherine's on Mt. Sinai written in a cursive uncial script unknown from other locales and dated to the ninth or tenth centuries preserve verses from the *Iliad* and their paraphrase by "Sophronios the Abbot," a ninth-century figure, possibly the same as the grammarian Sophronios, author of a textbook on grammar, whom modern scholars have identified with a patriarch of Alexandria reigning around the middle of the ninth century. The ad hoc style of writing used for the leaves and the linguistic register of the paraphrase suggest that the volume was used for instruction, a conclusion corroborated by the fact that the preserved excerpts

¹¹⁸ See Ullmann, *Die arabische Überlieferung*; of course, the genre of wisdom literature is an ancient Near Eastern tradition and its Arabic collections were enriched from many different sources beyond Greek. See Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature."

¹¹⁹ Browning, "Homer in Byzantium."

¹²⁰ Clackson and Papaconstantinou, "Coptic or Greek?," 88; Cribiore, "Greek and Coptic Education," 282.

¹²¹ On Theophilos of Edessa, see Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, 341–2; Breydy, *Geschichte der Syro-Arabischen Literatur der Maroniten*, 132–8.

¹²² A few leaves survive today as British Museum Additional MS 17210; see Browning, "Homer in Byzantium," 22 and n. 31.

all come from the first five books of the *Iliad*, exactly those that were used for instruction in Byzantine schools.¹²³ There is no reason to doubt the eyewitness report of Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, who heard Ḥunayn recite Homer in Baghdad after an absence of about two years during which, it is implied, he improved his knowledge of Greek.¹²⁴ In this narrative we are not told where Ḥunayn went to study, but other sources mention “the land of the Byzantines” (*bilād al-rūm*) and many modern scholars assume this was Constantinople, where the future apostle of the Slavs, Constantine/Cyril, was also reading Homer for his literary education at around the same time.¹²⁵ Significantly, Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm’s narrative specified that Ḥunayn’s recital of Homer took place at the house of a Greek resident of Baghdad, the nephew of Hārūn al-Rashīd’s Greek slave girl Chrysē, who ensured for him a good literary education in Greek although we are not told where exactly he received this schooling.

The study of Homer led to original poetic compositions, many on Christian themes, steeped in Homeric vocabulary. Surviving ninth-century examples were written both in Constantinople (by Ignatios the Deacon)¹²⁶ and Palestine (such as Michael Synkellos’ poem on the theology of the icons).¹²⁷ Poetry and its twin sister hymnography were staples in eighth and early ninth-century curricula of education, both in Byzantium and beyond. Almost every Byzantine who ever wrote anything also composed poetry,¹²⁸ but the struggle for and against the icons must have given poetry and hymnography renewed impetus as a means to broadcast one’s views, as is evident from an essay by Theodore Stoudios that extensively quotes iconoclastic poems and refutes them in prose.¹²⁹ Further, the concentration of women hymnographers in the first half of the ninth century suggests that poetry and hymnography may have been a standard component of female aristocratic education in Byzantium around this time.¹³⁰ Greek-educated Palestinians of the ninth century also excelled in this pursuit.¹³¹

Poetry is named by the hagiographer of St. Michael the Synkellos as one of the subjects taught in Jerusalem during the second half of the eighth century,

¹²³ Nikolopoulos, *Ta nea eurēmata*, 125–8, and plate 61.

¹²⁴ Quoted by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, ‘Uyūn al-anbā’, 1:185.

¹²⁵ Browning, “Homer in Byzantium,” 22.

¹²⁶ The poetic production of Ignatios the Deacon reflects acquaintance with both Homer and the ancient tragedians; see Lampakēs, “Παρατηρήσεις” (“Paratērēseis”), 129–32.

¹²⁷ Michael Synkellos, *Per la restaurazione delle venerande e sacre immagini*.

¹²⁸ Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur* [Greek trans.], 2:598.

¹²⁹ Theodore Stoudios, “Refutation and Subversion of the Impious Poems.”

¹³⁰ Mavroudi, “Learned Women,” 73.

¹³¹ Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 133–8; Mango, “Greek Culture,” 156.

and there is no reason to doubt his veracity on this score, since it is supported by the range of subjects with which Palestinian authors of the eighth and early ninth centuries engaged.¹³²

Among the topics taught by Greek and Syriac schools in late antiquity, philosophy is perhaps the most interesting to an Islamicist because of its obvious importance for understanding the development of Muslim thought. Our information on the pursuit of philosophy in Greek presents a gaping hole between the late sixth/early seventh and the early ninth century: no known philosophical compositions, names of authors, or manuscripts can be attached to this period.¹³³ By comparison, our information on the pursuit of philosophy in Syriac schools of the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries is enviably plentiful.¹³⁴ Accordingly, modern scholars have emphasized that the reception of Greek philosophy in the Muslim world echoed the curricula of Syriac schools during the early Islamic period, which, in their turn, reflected the curricula of Greek philosophical schools from the sixth century and earlier.¹³⁵ For example, in late antiquity Aristotle's *Categories* began to serve as an introduction to the study of philosophy.¹³⁶ Al-Kindī, a representative of the first generation of Muslim philosophers working with Greek materials, was also aware of the *Categories*.¹³⁷ This is not surprising, given that the text was abundantly available in Syriac, in the early sixth-century translation of Sergius of Reshaina and numerous subsequent re-translations and commentaries.¹³⁸ Yet the *Categories* was also studied in Byzantium during the eighth century, because patriarch Tarasios (ca 730–806) appears to have been familiar with it and the next generation of scholars, such as patriarch Nikephoros (ca 758–828) and Theodore the Studite (759–826), based their definition of an image on it.¹³⁹ The continued study

¹³² The curriculum of St. Michael's education in Jerusalem is described as "grammar, rhetoric, philosophy and, in addition, poetics and astronomy."

¹³³ See Ierodiakonou and Bydén, "Byzantine Philosophy."

¹³⁴ The bibliography on Syriac schools is abundant; see references in Griffith, *Hunayn b. Ishāq*, 135–7.

¹³⁵ A classic (though not error-free) monograph that enshrines this view is O'Leary, *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs*. See also Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 11–16, asserting that "secular" Greek learning was neglected and died out in Byzantium, but that Byzantium's isolation from the Islamic world shielded the Christian subjects of the caliphs from a similar attitude and enabled them to transmit Hellenism to the Muslims.

¹³⁶ Falcon, "Commentators on Aristotle."

¹³⁷ Adamson and Pormann, "Aristotle's *Categories* and the Soul."

¹³⁸ Georr, *Les categories d'Aristote dans leurs versions syro-arabes*.

¹³⁹ Anagnostopoulos, "Object and Symbol," 128–36. The useful article by Ierodiakonou, "The Byzantine Reception of Aristotle's *Categories*," does not trace the larger influence of this

of the *Categories* is consistent with Lemerle's assertion that the late antique curricula of education were largely preserved in Byzantium during the iconoclastic period, an assertion that can be extended also to philosophical texts that were more advanced reading. For example, eighth-century discussions on what is a good or a bad image echo passages from both Plato and Aristotle on who is a good judge of art and what may constitute good mimetic art.¹⁴⁰ Key are passages from Plato's *Laws* and the *Republic*, both translated into Arabic in the course of the ninth century.¹⁴¹ This suggests a Byzantine study of Plato earlier than his earliest known Greek manuscripts or the presumed revival of Platonism for the first time since antiquity by the eleventh-century scholars Michael Psellos and John Italos.

In a modern context, where ancient philosophy is viewed as a constituent element of modern Western civilization, scholars have found that it was of some consequence to decide who "saved" the Greek philosophical texts after the end of antiquity and therefore debated whether the agency in the selection of Greek materials for translation into Arabic lay with the Christian translators, many of whom were speakers of Syriac, or, as Gutas has forcefully argued, with the Muslim patrons.¹⁴² The stakes involved in answering this question are lowered if we accept that, during the eighth and early ninth centuries, many of the same philosophical texts were read both in Byzantium and the Muslim world – nobody "saved" them single-handedly.¹⁴³ Yet, making such an argument coherently by using philosophy as an example would require engaging in a complicated research project: recovering from the preserved record the philosophical views of iconoclast intellectuals who were so reviled after the victory of the icons that nothing of what they wrote survives. A well-known case in point is the iconoclast patriarch of Constantinople, John the Grammarian, who also served as Byzantine ambassador to the Arabs around 830.

It is safer to use the avenue of another discipline, grammar, which was also taught in late antique and medieval schools in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic, both in Byzantium and the Muslim world. Greek grammar seems intensively

work on Byzantine authors and only discusses Byzantine authors who wrote surviving commentaries on them. The earliest such commentaries were written in the ninth century by Patriarch Photios and Arethas of Caesarea.

¹⁴⁰ Anagnostopoulos, "Object and Symbol," 36.

¹⁴¹ For an overview of the Arabic translations of the *Republic*, see Reisman, "Plato's *Republic* in Arabic," 264–71. The *Laws* were translated into Arabic by Ḥunayn b. Ishāq; see D'Ancona, "Greek Sources in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy."

¹⁴² Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 2–4.

¹⁴³ See also the remarks on the Latin, Greek, and Arabic evidence for philosophical activity in the ninth century in Mavroudi, "Translations from Greek into Latin and Arabic."

cultivated by a number of authors writing in Muslim lands during the eighth and ninth centuries. The authors and dedicatees of treatises that can be placed within this period suggests that grammar was frequently written by and for people employed in the administration of the church, a group of individuals that seems to have occupied positions in both the Levant and Egypt, or at least to have been in communication with individuals resident in both locales. For example, we know of a Sophronios the Sophist, a teacher in the city of Edessa around the year 800, who taught St. Theodore of Edessa.¹⁴⁴ Scholars have contemplated his identification with Sophronios, patriarch of Alexandria *ca* 836–48, who addressed by John of bishop of Damietta (Tamiatha), a commentary of the grammatical tables by John of Charax. This is possibly the same Sophronios who wrote the Sinai paraphrase of the *Iliad*. Cyril Mango identified John of Charax the grammarian with John, bishop of Charachmoba, active during the second half of the eighth century.¹⁴⁵ Greek grammar must have been popular because it constituted the introduction to studying literary Greek, something deemed useful for various purposes (Muslim administration, Greek-into-Arabic translation, Christian church administration) within the caliphate throughout the eighth and ninth centuries. In addition, the concepts of Greek grammar were applied to the study of languages other than Greek throughout the Middle Ages. For example, translations of Dionysios Thrax existed in both Syriac and Armenian as early as the fifth century; Armenian *scholia* to Dionysios Thrax were written in the fifth, seventh, eighth, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth century, in other words almost continuously, not only in the period that we are considering, but also much later.

The interest evident in Greek grammar within the caliphate was shared by Syriac scholars: a series of Syriac manuscripts written between the seventh and the ninth centuries include extensive Greek annotations written around the same time as the main Syriac text. Marlia Mundell-Mango, who studied them, pointed out that the manuscripts indicate a particular preoccupation with the vocalization of Greek, perhaps to be connected with a broader interest in Greek grammar and the way its notions and categories could be applied to Syriac.¹⁴⁶ Further, there is evidence that local Christians in Edessa at the beginning of the ninth century desired, and received, an adequate treatise on Greek syntax and grammar. The fact is extremely important, given that the ninth century is considered as the formative period for the development of

¹⁴⁴ *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, no. 7683 for Theodore; no. 6844 for Sophronios.

¹⁴⁵ *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, no. 3115.

¹⁴⁶ Mango, "The Production of Syriac Manuscripts," 170–2.

Arabic grammar. While the connections between early Arabic approaches to grammar with their Greek equivalents of the Hellenistic period were already discussed by Merx (and others) since 1889,¹⁴⁷ the exact circumstances of the emergence of Arabic grammar as a theoretical discipline and its interaction with equivalents in other languages remain obscure;¹⁴⁸ and discussions on the connection of Greek and Arabic grammar have never included evidence from the grammarians of the Byzantine period.

A document that could lead to a better understanding of how approaches to Greek grammar may have influenced the organization of Arabic grammar as a discipline is the treatise on syntax by Michael the Synkellos. It is the earliest surviving work of this kind in Greek, and one that enjoyed tremendous circulation in the later Byzantine period and beyond: it survives in several tens of manuscripts and was printed four times in the course of the sixteenth century and at least once in the eighteenth.¹⁴⁹ Its title, well attested in the manuscript tradition, reads as follows: “Treatise on the construction of discourse by Michael, presbyter and synkellos of the apostolic see of Jerusalem, propounded ($\sigma\chiεδιασθεῖσα$) at Edessa in Mesopotamia at the request of the deacon Lazaros, the philosopher and logothete.” Scholars who accept the identification of Michael the Synkellos with St. Michael, the subject of the aforementioned hagiography, date it to around the year 810 and at any rate before Michael’s trip and 30-year residence in Byzantium.¹⁵⁰ Claudia Sode recently argued that St. Michael, the subject of the eponymous hagiographical account, was not a Synkellos (i.e., cell-mate) of Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem and cannot be considered the author of either the poem on the icons or the treatise on syntax, which were written by another Michael, the real Synkellos of Patriarch Thomas, known to us from having traveled to Armenia bringing the Greek translation of Theodore Abū Qurrah’s treatise.¹⁵¹ Sode’s suggestion does not change their approximate date and place of composition. In other words, regardless of which of the two Michaels wrote it, the treatise on syntax was composed by drawing from the Greek book resources of the caliphate and addressing the needs of readers found within it. In the opening paragraph to the work, Michael suggests to Lazaros that the study of syntax is long and time consuming, and for a thorough treatment refers him to Apollonios Dyskolos, Herodian, Apollonios the Younger, the Atticists, and Arcadius of Byzantium. At least two

¹⁴⁷ Merx, *Historia artis grammaticae apud Syros*; Versteegh, “Hellenistic Education.”

¹⁴⁸ Brief overview in Talmon, “Who was the First Arab Grammarian?”

¹⁴⁹ Michael Synkellos, *Le traité de la construction de la phrase*, 27.

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion of the date, see Mango, “Greek Culture in Palestine,” 154–5.

¹⁵¹ Sode, *Jerusalem*, 285–92.

of these authors (Apollonios the Younger and Arcadius) no longer survive, but one can reasonably assume that all were accessible without much difficulty in Edessa at the beginning of the ninth century – otherwise Michael would not have referred Lazarus to them. Michael clarifies that his own contribution will be to treat these profound issues concisely (which explains the subsequent popularity of Michael's work as well as Lazarus' desire for yet another treatise on Greek syntax, in spite of the fact that many must have been available).

The Greek texts chosen by Michael as examples to illustrate his grammatical points are also very telling, because they indicate not only what authors he was personally familiar with, but also what he expected Lazarus to know (and could therefore easily grasp and remember).¹⁵² By far the most examples come from the *Iliad*, with the most numerous passages drawn from the first two books. Considerably fewer examples are cited from the *Odyssey*. Though Michael shows himself conversant with the two poems in their entirety and not simply with a selection, it is clear that what he knows best, and perhaps also what he expects Lazarus to know well, are the first two books from the first of the two poems, in other words what the school instruction of Homer would have begun with. The second most frequently cited body of texts, if taken together, is ancient drama, which includes passages from two comedies by Aristophanes and the two tragedians, Sophocles and Euripides, limited to three plays each. This more or less corresponds to the Byzantine selection of readings from ancient drama for educational purposes, and, like the Byzantine selection, avoids Aeschylus, who is stylistically far more difficult to read and comprehend.¹⁵³ A close third, following right at the feet of ancient drama, are passages from the New Testament and the Psalter (a combination of texts that frequently appeared together in medieval manuscripts), with the addition of two passages from *Exodus* (i.e., the very beginning of the Old Testament only). Fourth is Gregory of Nazianzus, the most popular for his literary style among the Greek fathers, and the only one among them who is cited (if we except one citation of Synesius that does not appear on all the manuscripts).

¹⁵² The discussion that follows is based on the catalog of literary passages cited in the treatise on syntax as collected by Donnet in Michael Synkellos, *Le traité de la construction de la phrase*, 521–4.

¹⁵³ Michael quotes *Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, which corresponds exactly to the “Byzantine triad”; by far the most quotations are from *Ajax*, the play that, in the words of Arethas of Caesarea (born ca 860), “every school boy knew.” See Easterling, “Sophocles and the Byzantine Student,” 319–34. Michael quotes *Hecuba*, *Orestes*, and *Hippolytus* (Byzantine triad: *Hecuba*, *Orestes*, *Phoenician Women*). Michael quotes Aristophanes’ *Knights* and *Ploutos* (Byzantine triad: *Knights*, *Birds*, *Peace*).

Michael Synkellos' authors of reference partly coincide with those referred to in the works of a Constantinopolitan close contemporary we have also encountered, Ignatius the Deacon: both have a more than passing acquaintance with Homer;¹⁵⁴ both show acquaintance with Euripides;¹⁵⁵ it is possible that Ignatius, like Michael, may have also written a treatise on Greek grammar;¹⁵⁶ like Michael, he tried his hand at poetry.¹⁵⁷

Engagement with Greek at the caliphate was not confined to a Christian ghetto isolated from Byzantium simply as a text-based venture (as many nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars have largely imagined it, drawing conclusions from their own experience with learning classical languages within their contemporary curricula). The Gutas–Endress lexicon of Greek terms rendered into Arabic, as well as Manfred Ullmann's equivalent effort,¹⁵⁸ provide evidence that texts translated from Greek into Arabic indicate an engagement with Greek language at the oral level: the transliteration of Greek terms and proper names into Arabic is done not according to how these words are written on the page (or even how some of these words were transliterated in older translations from Greek into Syriac), but according to how they would have been pronounced in the living Greek of the Byzantine period;¹⁵⁹ and the mistakes committed in comprehending the ancient Greek text are frequently those that a Byzantine (speaking a different register of the same language) would have made.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Lampakēs, “Παρατηρήσεις” (“Paratērēseis”), 123–4.

¹⁵⁵ Ignatius knows *Iphigeneia en Taurois*, probably gleaned from the orations by Gregory of Nazianzus; see *ibid.*, 122–3.

¹⁵⁶ Lampakēs, “Παρατηρήσεις” (“Paratērēseis”), 130.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 131–2.

¹⁵⁸ Gutas and Endress, *A Greek and Arabic Lexicon*; Ullmann, *Wörterbuch*.

¹⁵⁹ See Gutas, “Greek Loanwords,” which summarizes the phonetic characteristic of these transliterations as follows: the *spiritus asper* is almost universally suppressed, iotaconsonants are abundant, the consonants have the phonetic value they have attained in modern Greek. See also the examples of transcriptions of Greek proper names into Arabic in Vagelpohl, *Aristotle's Rhetoric*, 150–4.

¹⁶⁰ Two examples: Vagelpohl, *Aristotle's Rhetoric*, 115, points out a mistranslation of Gr. *hōste* as Ar. *kay*; the medieval Arabic translator's mistake can be explained from the fact that, as we move more recently in time, the meaning of *hōste* gets limited to causation, suggested by the Arabic *kay*, although in the text of Aristotle this is not the intention. See also Cooper, *Galen: De diebus decretoriis*, 73, suggesting that Ḥunayn did not render the musical undertones of the verb *plēmmeleō* (used by Galen in its original sense, “to play a wrong note in music”) but translated it as *khati'a* (“to make a mistake”) because this had become its primary meaning in the Greek of Ḥunayn's time (although the meaning “to make a mistake” is already attested in Plato).

Michael Synkellos' treatise on syntax uses examples from classical and archaizing literature, but also includes vernacularisms (such as *blepō* instead of *horō*) in its explanations. It is difficult to imagine that oral competence in Greek, combined with an advanced literary culture, would have been possible without a somewhat regular contact with Byzantium (something analogous to the case of Greek in southern Italy – though the difference is that there Byzantium maintained a political presence until the eleventh century).

This would mean that the Greek texts received in Arabic were originally encountered not only within a Syriac but also a Byzantine hermeneutical tradition. In spite of the effort to divorce Byzantine and ancient Greek learning in the rhetorical attitude of Arabic sources regarding the translation movement, sometimes it is clear that the wisdom of the ancient Greeks is, in fact, that of the contemporary Byzantines, as in the eyewitness narrative of Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm on Ḥunayn b. Ishāq's return to Baghdad with the ability to recite Homer, called "the greatest poet of the Byzantines" (*yunshidu shi'rān bi-l-rūmīya li-ūmirus ra'īs shu'arā' al-rūm*), and the long hairstyle of a Byzantine *scholastikos*.¹⁶¹

There can be no doubt that spoken Greek among a Muslim caliph's subjects kept declining in the number of speakers the further we are chronologically removed from the seventh century – but it died a surprisingly slow death. At the same time, the evidence leaves no doubt that an interest in learning literary Greek was maintained for an even longer time. This, of course, happened within limited circles for specific reasons rooted in the elevated social and professional status of their members within the lands of the Muslims. But it would have been impossible without recourse to speakers of Greek trained in the Byzantine educational curriculum and Greek books that reflected a Byzantine selection and interpretation of texts, such as it was pursued within the Byzantine empire at exactly the same time.

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¹⁶¹ Strohmaier, "Homer in Bagdad," 196.

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Kalām and the Greeks¹

Fritz W. Zimmermann

1 Introduction

In the beginning was the dilemma, and the dilemma was with Corax and Tisias of Syracuse. To them the Greeks attribute the invention early in the fifth century BCE of the art of rhetoric. Tisias, we are told, went to Corax in order to learn the trick of swaying a jury by the sheer power of words. They agreed upon a fee payable if Tisias won his first case in court. The course completed, Tisias refused to put his newly acquired skill to the test, until Corax lost patience and took him to court for the fee. “Whether he wins or loses this case,” Corax pleaded, “Tisias will have to pay me: on the strength of your (the judges’) verdict if he loses, and under the terms of our contract if he wins.” But Tisias replied that on the contrary he would not have to pay: on the strength of the verdict if he won, and under the terms of the contract if he lost. The judges muttered in disgust: “A bad egg from a bad crow.”

The name of the game is dilemmatic argument. That species of bad egg claims our attention for the part it may have played in the pre-history of Muslim dialectic (*kalām*). Here are three examples from Islamic theology:

1.1

If [the Qadarite] says: God does not force His servants to sin in order then to punish them for it, what shall we reply? Ask him: Can God’s servant harm or benefit himself? If he says No . . . ask him: Does then God create evil?

If he says Yes, he has abandoned his doctrine.

And if he says No, he is guilty of unbelief. For God says: “Say: I take refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak from the evil of what He has created” (Q 113.1). This goes to show that it is God who creates evil.²

¹ This paper was originally given at the Third International Colloquium of From Jahiliyya to Islam (July 1985). My old friend and colleague Patricia always told me that I ought to publish it and it seems fitting that I should now do so in a volume dedicated to her.

² Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 141, citing *al-Fiqh al-Absat*, 43:7–12.

1.2

Tell us about the terms of life. Who fixed their dates? Are they fixed [in advance] or are they not?

If they say: God fixed them [in advance], they have responded [to your summons].

But if they say: They are not fixed [in advance] ask: Can one, then, add to them or detract from them so as to advance or postpone them at will?

If they say No, they contradict themselves.

And if they say Yes, say: Your claim, then, is that men can advance what God has fixed for later, or postpone what God has fixed for earlier. And that is to give the lie to God's revelation. For He says: "But God will never defer any soul when its term comes. And God is aware of the things you do" (Q 63.11).³

1.3

We ask them: Tell us about the verse "So fear God as far as you are able" (Q 64.16). Is it not the case that He orders His servants to fear God as far as they are able?

[If they say No, they contradict the Book of God.]

If they say Yes, ask them: If a man fasted and prayed on only one day of the month of Ramadan, or prayed only one *rak'a* every day and night, could he act differently?

If they say Yes, they have given up their doctrine.

If they say: No, he could not, they should be asked: You would order him to pray and fast despite his inability [to obey], would you?

If they say: We should order no such thing, they make it permissible not to pray or fast.

And if they say: We should indeed so order him, despite his inability [to obey], they are preposterous and contradict the Book of God. For God says: "So fear God as far as you are able," and: "We charge not any soul save to its capacity" (Q 2.233, 286; 6.152; 7.42; 23.62). So while God says that He does not charge any soul save to the capacity He has given it, you would

³ van Ess, *Anfänge*, 15–16, citing the anti-Qadarite questions attributed to Hasan b. Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya.

charge a man to do things for which his Lord had given him no capacity.⁴

Passage 1.1 is from one of two small batches of similar arguments included in a document of Hanafite *kalām*. Passages 1.2 and 1.3 are from two pamphlets consisting almost entirely of such arguments. Those two pamphlets are the only Arabic examples so far recorded of a literary genre much better attested in Syriac: the dilemmatic questions genre. An inventory of Syriac examples was begun by Michael Cook and continued by Sebastian Brock.⁵ It includes questions by Nestorians, Monophysites, Chalcedonians (Melkites), and Monotheletes (Maronites) against one another and against other heretics and infidels. Most are both dateless and anonymous. All seem to belong to the sixth and seventh centuries. Of particular interest are four Nestorian sets from the year 612 and a collection of 23 pieces preserved in a Sinaite codex of the late seventh century. The Nestorian material shows our genre at an early stage of evolution; there are lots of ifs but few dilemmas. Here is a sample from a piece designed to rebut the charge that, in assigning two natures to Christ, Nestorians were turning the Trinity into a quaternity:

1.4

If the Trinity of equal nature is confessed, how is he who is not of the nature of the Trinity counted with the Trinity as a fourth?...

And further they shall say to us: Was the body which was from Mary changed in its nature from the nature of the Trinity or not?

If it was not changed, it was consubstantial with the Father and the Spirit.

If, however, it was changed, we ask: As the body was changed in its nature, was it so changed in its hypostasis from the hypostases of the Trinity or not?

But if it was not changed, see, precise quaternity is confessed by you.

If it was changed, how when you speak of a change of the body from the Trinity do you not speak of quaternity ...?"⁶

⁴ Hādī, *al-Radd ‘alā al-Mujbirā wa-l-Qadariyya*, fol. 129b, 11–19. I owe my knowledge of this piece to Michael Cook.

⁵ Cook, "The Origins of Kalām," 34–40; Brock, "Two Sets of Monothelete Questions," 120–2.

⁶ Abramowski and Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection*, 11:95:16–31 = Chabot, *Synodicon orientale*, Appendix.

In the Sinai collection, on the other hand, we find our genre firmly set on the way to dilemmatic monoculture. One or two pieces are quite without dilemmatic argument; some are against the Melkites; some are answers rather than questions; some only give the questions (usually in the form “Tell me:..., yes or no?”) without the arguments. But the dilemma is prevalent. And more than other documents, the Sinai collection affords us a solid sense of being confronted by a well-established genre. Here are three questions, picked out almost at random, from a set of seven against the Julianists:

1.5

(1) [If you are asked:] The body of God, is it God or not?

[then reply] to him: The soul of God, is it God or not?

If he answers Yes, ask him: Is there for you a difference between God and divinity when speaking of the hypostasis, yes or no?

If he answers Yes, it [his error] is proved.

If he answers No, you must ask him: Is the soul of God separated from His body or not?

If he answers No, it [his position] is refuted.

If, however, he admits that it is separated, that the divinity is separated from the body, in accordance with the answer that he gave before, it is blasphemy...⁷

It would appear that some, perhaps all, of the Sinai pieces were originally composed in the late sixth century and in the Greek language. To one of them the Greek original still exists: “Questions (*epaporēseis*) of an Orthodox against those assigning a single nature to Christ” by Eulogius, Melkite patriarch of Alexandria (581–607). The text is made up of twelve sections (*kephalaia*). The first seven are dilemmatic, the rest are not. Here is an example of each type:

1.6

(4) You may appear to agree with us on the incarnate nature of God the Word. But if from that you want us to understand that God the Word and the flesh are of one substance, how can the created and the uncreated, the eternal and the temporal, be the same in substance?

⁷ Bettiolo, *Una Raccolta di opuscoli calcedonensi*, 31:19–27.

And if we are to think of that substance as possessed of a single nature containing another or contained by another, who would think of calling one plus one, not two, but one?

(10) If you agree that the Christ is both God and man even after the union, and that it is not on account of one and the same nature that he is both God and man, how can the Christ fail to be two natures when he is both God and man?⁸

Eulogius belongs to a movement in sixth-century Melkite theology, which it has become customary to call Neo-Chalcedonianism. One of the earliest members of that movement was John the Grammarian of Caesarea, the butt of the *Contra Impium Grammaticum* of Severus of Antioch (d. ca 538). Eulogius read and excerpted him. In his surviving polemic writings we see the dilemma on the march with still some way to go. Here are two samples from his “Seventeen Questions (*kephalaia*) against the Monophysites (*akephaloi*)”:

1.7

(2) If according to you God the Word and the flesh are of one nature while the nature of the Father is not the same as that of the flesh, how can the nature of God the Word and that of God the Father be one and the same? How can the nature of uncreated divinity and that of the created flesh, the nature of timeless divinity and that of the temporal flesh of the Word be a single one, without the nature of divinity being turned into that of the flesh or the nature of the flesh being changed to that of divinity, when on the contrary both natures are to be preserved unchanged and undifferentiated in the Emanuel?

(6)... If, like ourselves, you say that it was in the flesh that the Christ underwent death and suffering, you are right. But I wish to know whether the flesh is the same in substance as the nature of his divinity or different.

If the same, you are telling us that God can suffer. If different in nature, albeit hypostatically united with God the Word, why do you not agree that there are two natures in the one Christ?⁹

⁸ Diekamp, *Doctrina Patrum*, 153:16–22, 154:18–21.

⁹ Richard, *Iohannis Caesariensis presbyteri*, 61–3.

Section (6) culminates in a dilemma, and there are two or three other such highpoints in the piece. The non-dilemmatic question of section (2) reappears in dilemmatic form in section (4) of Eulogius (passage 1.6 above), nicely illustrating the dilemma's progress in the sixth century. Assuming that the pieces by John and Eulogius demarcate the formative period of the genre, we may surmise that by the seventh century the pattern was complete. With Eulogius the dilemma is paramount, though the stylistic monotony of a stereotyped format of question and answer is still some way off. And if we go back behind John of Caesarea, we come upon a piece like the *Syntagmation* of Aetius the Anomean in the middle of the fourth century, which is almost completely devoid of dilemmas. It consists of 37 short sections, each beginning with "if." Here are three of them:

1.8

- (11) If the Almighty Deity being of ingenerate nature does not know himself as of generate nature, but the Son being of generate nature knows himself to be what he is, how could the *homoousion* not be a fallacy, when one knows himself to be ingenerate and the other generate?
- (19) If ingeneracy is revelatory of privation in respect of God, and ingeneracy were non-entity, what kind of reasoning would deprive the non-existent of a non-entity? If it signifies reality, who would part God in his real being from himself?
- (27) If cause is assigned to every generate thing, and the ingenerate nature is uncaused, ingeneracy does not reveal cause, but indicates substance.¹⁰

Is section (19) dilemmatic? Is it meant to be? If it is, it is without parallel in the rest of the piece. Clearly Aetius is not a cultivator of dilemmas. Equally clearly his piece anticipates characteristic features of our questions genre. We may take it as an early manifestation in Greek dogmatic controversy of that habit of if-based hypothesizing and hostile consequence-making, which eventually came to light upon the dilemma as a handy and congenial tool.

Passages 1.6 to 1.8 above supply the kind of Greek evidence that has up to now been wanting in the discussion of the origins of the Arabic questions. Suggestive parallels have been observed in the polemic *Opuscula* of John of

¹⁰ Wickham, "Syntagmation of Aetius," 546–8.

Damascus. Here, to round off my survey, is a dilemmatic passage from his dialogue *Contra Manichaeos*:

(30) Tell us, Manichaeans: that beginningless evil of yours which you call matter—is it incorporeal, or is it body, or is it composite?

If incorporeal, how can it be matter? . . . or will you say that it has produced body without being corporeal itself? In that case, tell us whether out of its own substance or out of what is not.

If you say “out of its own substance,” you are wrong . . .

And if you say “out of what is not,” tell us why [your beginningless evil] has not made . . . souls that are just as naturally bad as you claim bodies to be . . .

If [your beginningless evil is] body, how did it move when all body is by itself devoid of will and life? . . . Who set it in motion—the Good One? But then, it would surely be the work of one neither good nor wise or provident to set in motion evil.

And if you say [that your beginningless evil is] composite, you must realise that if there is to have been composition, there must first have been the components plain and simple . . . And so you will have two principles of evil, not just one.¹¹

John of Damascus died about 750 and so his evidence is too late to prove the Greek origin of a genre previously attested in Syriac. Cook, in drawing attention to the Syriac evidence, accordingly left the question open. It has since been settled by the publication of the Sinai collection, which puts us on to the Greek evidence surveyed above. The example of Eulogius (passage 1.6 above) alone suffices, not only to confirm that, as Cook inferred from the Syriac material collected by him, the dilemmatic questions genre is older than Islam, but also to justify the conclusion that it is indeed of Greek origin. And that is the starting point for my inquiry.

No doubt my inventory is incomplete. But let us suppose that future discoveries will not drastically change the impression gained so far: that as a tool of sectarian debate the dilemmatic questions genre developed in a sixth-century Greek milieu, flourished in a seventh-century Syriac milieu, and was most at home in the Levant. Let us further suppose that the existence of Arabic specimens means that the form crossed over into Arabic at a time when it was still alive—that is, in the seventh or early eighth century. Let us grant that that is also the period most likely to have seen the beginnings of *kalām*. And let us

¹¹ John of Damascus, “*Contra Manichaeos*,” 1533–5.

accept Cook's conclusion that, in that case, it is in Syria, and from Syriac theology, that incipient *kalām* is most likely to have contracted the habit of plotting dilemmas against the heterodox. Then let us see whether we can sustain the attractive idea that *kalām* itself came into being in just such a way: as a continuation with Muslim means and for Muslim ends of a living Greco-Syriac tradition. If so, what is the tradition we are to regard *kalām* as a continuation of? Is there such a thing as Greek *kalām*? I think there is.

2 Dilemmas

Not all *kalām* is contentious, not all contentious *kalām* is dilemmatic. But there is a feeling, which I share, that dilemmas are typical of a brand of dialectic typical of *kalām*. I shall proceed on the assumption that where there are dilemmas there is *kalām*. First we must understand the nature of the thing. Here is what a logician has to say about it: "The dilemma, a common form of argument in ordinary language, is a legacy from older times when logic and rhetoric were more closely connected than they are today. From the strictly logical point of view, the dilemma is not of special interest or importance. But rhetorically the dilemma is perhaps the most powerful instrument of persuasion ever devised. It is a devastating weapon in controversy."¹² We shall see in due course that there is indeed an ancient connection between dilemma and rhetoric. But if it is true that we commonly use dilemmas in everyday argument, it is because our habits have been refined by centuries of classical education. And if the dilemma fails to fascinate logicians, it is because it readily reduces to more primitive forms of argument. Primitive forms—like *modus Barbara* (all As are Bs; all Bs are Cs; therefore all As are Cs) or *modus tollens* (if p then q; but not q; therefore not p)—are basic, hence ubiquitous, hence rhetorically trite. The dilemma is neither primitive nor common in that sense. It would not be so stunning if it were. Dilemmas are arguments from the two (or more) limbs of an exhaustive disjunction to a single conclusion.

- (i)
- Either q or r.
- If q then s.
- If r then s.
- Therefore s.

¹² Copi and Cohen, *Introduction to Logic*, 245.

If it is possible to continue the disjunction with “or x” and to add “if x then not-s” to the premises, the argument fails. The pattern is fail-safe only in the following fuller form.

(ii)
 Either q or r or both or neither
 If q then s
 If r then s
 If both then s
 If neither then s
 Therefore s.

The classical dilemma secures exhaustive disjunction by replacing r with not-q.

(iii)
 [Either q or not-q]
 If q then s
 If not-q then s
 Therefore s.

The first premise is now redundant because logically true: out of any pair of contradictories, one must be true. A rather special case arises if we substitute q for s.

(iv)
 [Either q or not-q]
 [If q then q]
 If not-q then q
 Therefore q.

The first premise, too, has now become redundant, leaving us with the revelation—the Jesuits used to call it *consequentia mirabilis*—that any proposition entailed by its own negation must be true. The best-known example of that pattern is one attributed to Aristotle: *ei philosopheteon philosopheteon; ei me philosopheteon philosopheteon; pantos ara philosopheteon*—“[Reasoning is either necessary or it is not;] if it is, it is; if it is not, it is [in order to explain why not]; in either case reasoning is necessary.” If “p” is what you wish to prove (or disprove), an argument of type (i), (ii), or (iii) will not always be easy to obtain. The type of argument most productive of dilemmas is that of indirect argument by *modus tollens* when the consequent of the first premise is a disjunction:

(v)

If p then either q or r or ...

Not q

Not r

Not ...

Therefore not-p.

(vi)

If p then either q or not-q

Not q

Not not-q

Therefore not-p.

A dilemmatic effect is achieved by giving the negative premises the form of *modus tollens* arguments showing that each disjunct entails some falsehood (F):

(vii)

If p then either q or not-q

If q then F

If not-q then F

Therefore not-p.

If truths and falsehoods are in doubt, you may decide to argue that the implications of q and not-q, if not palpably false, are certainly unpalatable. And you will conclude that, not being tenable without distress (D), p should be rejected.

(viii)

If p then either q or not-q

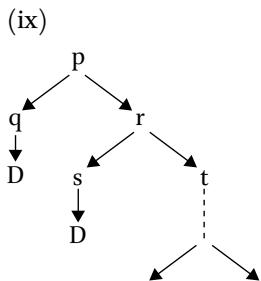
If q then D

If not-q then D

Therefore let us have none of p.

That is the pattern most widely employed in public debate where those unable to escape distress will be deemed to have lost the argument. The substitution of D for F vastly broadens the scope of the pattern by opening the door to arguments *ad hominem*. But that does not explain the dilemma's popularity in rhetoric. Its appeal is an aesthetic one, arising from the beguiling symmetry of its conditional sequences. To prove the point we have what has been described as the "multi-stage dilemma argument" (passage 1.11 below). Given your thesis

p, says the questioner (attacker, opponent) to the answerer (defender, proponent), you must concede either q or r. If you assert q, you will be in trouble; if you assert r, you must concede either s or t. If you assert s, you will be in trouble; if you assert t, etc.—until a point is reached at which all options end in distress. At that point the questioner will conclude that the answerer cannot reasonably maintain p and must accordingly concede defeat. The pattern is best represented by a diagram consisting of progressive bifurcations:



Abandon p!!

The forklike nature of the dilemma presumably explains why a particular dilemma went down in history as Morton's fork. Archbishop Morton, chancellor to Henry VII of England, is said to have justified extortionate taxation by arguing that if people lived extravagantly they must have a lot to spend, and if they did not they must have saved a lot: in either case they could afford to pay up. One may not think highly of that argument, but “fork” is certainly a good word for “dilemma,” which it will sometimes be convenient to use. It is conceivable that an author might hit upon a single fork by a stroke of untutored dialectical genius. Multiple forks of type (ix) can only be the work of a deliberate art: the art of *kalām*.

3 Greek Dilemmas

Parmenides of Elea begot Zeno of Elea. Zeno begot Gorgias and was godfather to a tribe of dialecticians culminating in Diodorus Cronus. Diodorus in turn inspired the dialectic of the Stoics and the Academic skeptics. Parmenides drew what he thought was an exhaustive distinction between “what is” and “what is not,” arguing that “the path of what is not” was unviable. And in so doing, on one reading of the text, he used a fork:

1.10

Only one story of a path is now left; namely, that [it] is. On this path there are many signs showing that what is is uncreated and indestructible, whole, unique, unmoved and perfect... For what birth will you seek for it?...

I will not allow you to say or think that it came from what is not... Nor will the force of convincing proof ever allow that from what is there should come into being anything besides itself.¹³

A generation later, Zeno compiled a large number of arguments against those rejecting the thesis of his teacher Parmenides. Not all the arguments were equally profound. Plato makes his Zeno explain that, as a whole, they were not a completely solemn performance, having been written with the aim of victory in philosophical debate by himself as a young man.¹⁴ Only a few of those arguments survive in quotation. One of them is clearly a fork: "If a thing moves, it moves either in the place where it is, or in the place where it is not. But it moves neither in the place it is in (for it is at rest therein) nor in the place where it is not (for it is not in it). Therefore nothing moves."¹⁵ The others are of the form:

(x)
 If p then q
 If p then not-q
 Therefore not-p.

And that is nothing but an inverted dilemma. For the second premise is logically equivalent to "if q then not-p," the second to "if not-q then not-p." The conclusion remains of course the same. We may therefore infer that Zeno cultivated dilemmatic argument.

Next we come to the sophist Gorgias (*ca 480–380 BCE*). In his treatise *On What is Not* he argues, first of all, that "nothing exists":

1.11

That nothing exists is established by a multi-stage dilemma argument... "If something exists, either what is exists, or what is not, or both

¹³ Hussey, *The Presocratics*, 88.

¹⁴ Ibid., 100.

¹⁵ Sextus, *Against the Physicists*, 2:87 (also referred to as *Adversus Mathematicos*, 10:87).

what is and what is not.” Each of these possibilities is then considered and rejected in turn, in arguments that in some cases employ a further disjunction. Thus to refute the subordinate thesis that “what is” exists, he considers the possibilities that it is either eternal, or generated, or both eternal and generated, and these are rejected in turn, in one instance in an argument that sets up yet another dilemma: if it is generated, then it is generated either from what is, or from what is not.¹⁶

Diodorus Cronus (d. ca 284 BCE) belonged to a group of thinkers calling themselves the “Dialecticians.”¹⁷ He favored dilemmatic arguments of types (v) and (vi).¹⁸ The argument against motion attributed to Zeno by Diogenes Laertius may in fact be his.¹⁹ Here is another one of his arguments in the same vein:

1.12

If the wall perishes, either the wall perishes when the stones are in contact . . . or it perishes when they are apart.

But neither does the wall perish when they are in contact . . . nor does it perish when they are apart from each other. Therefore the wall does not perish.²⁰

David Sedley plausibly suggests that “Diodorus taught both the use of dialectical puzzles and the logic of their solution; and that the former skill became the backbone of skepticism in the Academy, while the latter contributed to the evolution of Stoic logic.”²¹ That logic, called dialectic by the Stoics themselves, is known to us only in fragments. But it certainly covered dilemmatic argument. Origen tells us that the Stoics called form (x) *dia dyo tropikon* “argument from two conditionals,” quoting as an example: “If you know you are dead, you are dead; if you know you are dead, you are not dead; therefore you do not know that you are dead.”²² And Sextus Empiricus records the Stoic schema of form (iv) and repeatedly discusses the example: “If there is proof, there is proof; if there is no [i.e., can be no such thing as] proof, there is proof. But proof

¹⁶ Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience*, 82.

¹⁷ Sedley, “Diodorus Cronus,” 75.

¹⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹⁹ Ibid., 84.

²⁰ Translated by Sedley, “Diodorus Cronus,” 84–5, from Sextus Empiricus.

²¹ Ibid., 83.

²² Origen, “Contra Celsum,” 1444 (= Book 7, para. 15).

either does exist or does not; therefore there is proof.”²³ The argument aims to refute the skeptic thesis that nothing can be known for certain. The Skeptics turned the fork around: “If there is no proof, there is no proof; if there is proof [such as the Stoics would offer], there is no proof [for what the Stoics are offering by way of proof proves nothing]; therefore there is no proof.”

Such are the classical sources of Greek *kalām*. In order to see what became of them, we must now turn to the Second Sophistic and thereafter. The physician Galen (*ca* 130–200 CE) was what they would call an “iatrosophist”—or perhaps rather, in his case, an “iatrophilosopher,” as he was unusually well read in philosophy. In his day the torch of skepticism was carried by the Empiricists, a school of medical theory. One of Galen’s earliest writings (surviving only in Arabic) is a debate between an Empiricist and a “dogmatist” (the word used by Skeptics for theorists relying on speculative reasoning). The Empiricist cites three notorious examples of stalemate between rival theories. First, compound bodies must be the result of either the juxtaposition or the interpenetration of their components. But the first theory entails the non-existence of God and His providence, and the second makes the mind boggle. Similar problems beset the issues of the beginning of the universe, and of the existence of motion: “The argument by which motion is contradicted is of such difficulty as to cause the dogmatists and dialecticians who concern themselves with it much trouble and distress when trying to refute it.” Here is the gist of the second example:

1.13

The world has either been created or it has not.

If it has not been created, then (absurdly) God is not required as either creator or even provider.

If it has been created, then (absurdly) God was prior to creating it either unwilling or unable to do so.²⁴

What is the conclusion? What is to take the place of “p” in pattern (vi)? It seems to me that we have here an excellent example of what might be called the “Skeptic Master Dilemma,” which goes somewhat as follows:

²³ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, 2:281 (also referred to as *Adversus Mathematicos*, 8:281). That, presumably, was the model for the more elegant *ei philosopheteon* fathered on Aristotle by later tradition: see below.

²⁴ Walzer, *Galen on Medical Experience*, 122–3.

(xi)

To assert anything is to assert either p or not-p

If p then A

If not-p then A

Therefore, to assert anything is absurd.

The richest single source of Greek dilemmas is undoubtedly the work of the Empiricist iatrosophist Sextus, who flourished about two generations after Galen. In book after book Sextus contrives to show up the hollowness of received dogma in grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, physics, metaphysics, and ethics, often by means of forks. Here is an example of his *kalām*:

1.14

The matter proposed is either a sense-object or about a thought-object, but whichever it is, it is an object of controversy... Will they then assert that the controversy can or cannot be decided? If they say it cannot, we have it granted that we must suspend judgment... But if they say that it can be decided, we ask by what it is to be decided. For example, in the case of the sense-object... is it to be decided by a sense-object or a thought-object? If they say by a sense-object... that object itself also will require another to confirm it... and so on *ad infinitum*. And if the sense-object shall have to be decided by a thought-object, then... [it] will need examination and confirmation. Whence, then, will it gain confirmation? If from an intelligible object, it will suffer a similar regress *ad infinitum*; and if from a sensible object... the Mode of circular reasoning is brought in... And concerning the intelligible object we argue similarly... Thus the intelligible also is referred to the Five Modes, so that in all cases we are compelled to suspend judgment concerning the object presented.²⁵

Sextus' contemporaries Numenius and Ammonius Saccas (who taught Plotinus in Alexandria) are credited by the Christian bishop Nemesius of Emesa (ca 400 AD) with a set of three arguments against the Stoic thesis that the soul was a body. The second of those arguments consists of a set of forks:

²⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1:169–77.

1.15

Now if anyone, one of the Stoics for example, retorts that there is something in bodies that moves them . . . we must ask them: what is this force?

If they will have it that this force is material, we retrace our previous arguments.

If, on the other hand, it is said not to be matter, but only to be connected with matter . . . is it material or immaterial? If they answer material, how can it be something connected with matter but not actually matter?

If they say that it is not matter, then surely it is immaterial; and if immaterial, then incorporeal . . .²⁶

At the time of the emperor Julian the Apostate (361–2), an otherwise unknown Sallustius gives a popular account of Neoplatonic cosmology. One chapter refutes the destructibility of the world in three sets of forks:

1.16

(a) Whatever is destroyed is destroyed either by itself or by something else.

If the universe is destroyed by itself, fire ought to burn itself . . .

If the universe is destroyed by something else, that something must be either corporeal or incorporeal.

Incorporeal it cannot be, since things incorporeal, as nature and soul, preserve things corporeal . . .

If corporeal, it must be either from among bodies existing [in the universe] or from among others.

If the first, then bodies moving in circles must destroy bodies moving in straight lines or bodies moving in straight lines must destroy bodies moving in circles . . . [neither of which happens]

If the universe is destroyed by other bodies, whence they come or where they are now cannot be said.

(b) Further, whatever perishes perishes either in form or in matter. If the form perishes . . .

If matter perishes . . .

(c) Further, whatever perishes either is resolved into its components or disappears into nothingness.

If . . .²⁷

²⁶ Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, 263.

²⁷ Nock, “Sallustius Concerning the Gods,” 31–3.

Sallustius' Christian contemporary Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, begins the first argument of his *Catechetical Oration* with a set of forks but afterwards lapses into linear progression.

1.17

When the discussion is with a Hellene [i.e., a man of pagan Greek culture], it would be well to begin the argument in this way: Does he presuppose God's existence or does he agree with the view of the atheists?

If he says that God does not exist, then from the skillful and wise arrangement of the world he can be led to acknowledge the existence of some power which is manifested by it and which transcends the universe.

But if he has no doubt of God's existence and is carried away by ideas of a plurality of gods, we should use with him some such argument as follows: Does he think the divine is perfect or imperfect?

If, as he probably will, he testifies to the perfection of the divine nature...²⁸

In the early fifth century, the Christian sophist [i.e., teacher of rhetoric] Troilus treats us to a discussion of the thesis that there is no such thing as rhetoric:

1.18

We must now inquire whether rhetoric exists... For since some deny that it does, we must examine their argument. Now they will question you as follows. Does rhetoric treat of private or of public affairs?

If you say of private affairs, they will say that in that case it is not a political science...

And if you say of public affairs, they will ask: of one such public affair or of all?

If you say of one, they will say that in that case it is not a science.

And if you say of all, they ask: Does it understand the things it treats of or does it not understand them?

Then if you say it does not understand them, the conclusion is that rhetoric should be avoided.

²⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 3–4.

And if you say that it does, they will say that in that case either rhetoric is superfluous or all the other sciences are. Against these we say ...²⁹

Later in the century, the Neoplatonist Proclus (d. 485 CE), who was head of the philosophical school of Athens, composed 18 arguments (*epikheiremata*) about the eternity of the world against the Christians. One of these arguments, the third, consists of forks:

1.19

The creator creates either always or only sometimes. If always, creation will be permanent and hence without beginning.

If only sometimes, there must have been a cause that made the creator actualize his creative potential; and that cause must be active either always or only sometimes.

If always, creation will be permanent.

If only sometimes, there must be a prior, permanent cause, or else an infinite chain of causes, which is impossible.³⁰

In Proclus's book, one dilemma argument among 18 was evidently enough. It is not before the second half of the sixth century, when only the school of Alexandria was left, that we see the dilemma making dramatic inroads into philosophical argument. We have introductory lecture courses entitled "Prolegomena to Aristotle's Philosophy" by successive generations of teachers: Ammonius (fl. 500), Simplicius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus (ca 550), and Elias (ca 580). They follow one another closely, but Elias is the first to quote in Aristotle's name the *ei philosopheteon* argument in its final lapidary form. Elsewhere, Ammonius simply says that it is the goal of Aristotle's philosophy to understand that the universe has but one source or principle. Olympiodorus adds, in Aristotle's name, a dull categorical syllogism by way of proof: all that is is administered well; what is administered well is well ordered; what is well ordered is so ordered by a single hand; therefore, all that is is arranged by a single hand. Elias, now, instead produces two sprightly dilemma arguments:³¹

²⁹ Rabe, *Prolegomenon Sylloge*, 48 (= no. 5: *Trōilou Sophistou Prolegomena*).

³⁰ (Paraphrase) Rabe, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, 42–3. See also English translation: Share, *Against Proclus*, 42–3.

³¹ Busse, *Eiae in Porphyrii Isagogen*, 120:1–15.

1.20

(a) The universe has either one principle or many.

If one, well and good.

If many, they are either well ordered or without order.

If without order, what they engender will be less orderly still. [But in fact the world is well ordered.]

If well ordered, [it is] either by themselves or by some external cause.

If by themselves, they will have something in common, which will be the common principle.

If by an external cause, there will be either one or many such causes, and so forth. But there can be no infinite regress of principles.

Therefore, the universe has a single principle.

(b) Either there is one principle or there are many.

If many, they will engender either the same consequences or different ones.

If the same, all but one are redundant.

If different ones, all but one are imperfect. But nothing divine is ever imperfect.

Therefore, the universe has but a single principle.

These arguments are not, as Elias suggests, from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. For all we know, they may have come out of his own head. What they show is that forks were popular in late sixth-century Alexandria. The patriarch Eulogius, then, was not alone in his predilection for forks. Indeed, he and his Neo-Chalcedonian friends seem to have been in cahoots with the Christian professors of philosophy. The last of them, Stephanus, enjoyed some notoriety as a dialectical scourge of the Monophysites. One Monophysite, Probus, came from Syria to confront him, but Stephanus won him over to the Neo-Chalcedonian dilemmatic cause. A set of dilemmatic questions by Probus against his erstwhile fellow Monophysites is preserved in the Sinai collection mentioned in section 1 above. That was the last flowering of Greek dialectics in the southeast corner of the Mediterranean prior to the Persian and Arab invasions of the seventh century.³²

32 van Roey, "Une controverse christologique," 349–53.

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“Arabs” and “Iranians”: The Uses of Ethnicity in the Early Abbasid Period

Michael Cooperson

1 Introduction

In Ramaḍān 219/September 834, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was brought before the caliph al-Mu’taṣim and asked to assent to the doctrine that the Qur’ān was created.¹ When he refused, he was flogged until he lost consciousness. He was then released into the custody of Ishaq ibn Ibrāhīm, the governor of Baghdad. After several hours he was allowed to go home. His cousin Ḥanbal b. Ishaq (d. 273/886) describes his departure as follows:

At sunset, [Aḥmad] was led out of the house on a mount belonging to Ishaq ibn Ibrāhīm and rode to his own house surrounded by the caliph’s officials and his own people. When he reached the gate, I heard ‘Ayyāsh, the Master of the Bridge, say, when he saw [Aḥmad] approaching – I heard ‘Ayyāsh say to Ishaq’s man, with everyone standing there – *Tāzīh tāzīh*, which means ‘*arabī ‘arabī*.²

What can ‘Ayyāsh have meant? As the storyteller informs us, *tāzīh* (Middle Persian *tazīg*, modern *tāzī*) means ‘*arabī*: that is, an Arab.³ By the usual genealogical criterion, Aḥmad certainly fit the bill: his biographers purport to trace his

¹ This paper has been much improved by the comments and corrections of Patricia Crone, Amikam Elad, Michael Morony, and Behnam Sadeghi. I have not responded adequately to all their objections; I can only hope that the differences have more to do with emphasis (since they are historians and I am a philologist) than with substance. Any remaining errors of fact or interpretation are entirely my responsibility.

² Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 60.

³ I thank M. Rahim Shayegan for explaining the forms. The word also refers to a kind of hunting dog (Anvari, *Farhang*, s.v. *tāzī*). One reader of this paper suggested that this might be the intended meaning, the point being to insult Aḥmad. But the story itself tells us that the word means ‘*arabī*. Also, it seems to me that calling someone a dog requires calling him a dog, not a beagle or a poodle.

ancestry through Shaybān back to Ismā‘īl.⁴ But ‘Ayyāsh clearly had something besides genealogy in mind. Of the various possibilities I have considered, the likeliest is that suggested to me by Professor Crone: namely, that “Arab” in this context means a rigid, legalistic scholar.⁵ In this case Aḥmad earned the title by withdrawing from theological argument and refusing to acknowledge the religious authority of the Abbasid caliph.

In her recently published *Nativist Prophets*, Professor Crone offers an insightful survey of the various meanings of the word “Arab.” In its literal sense, she writes, the word referred to “a person who descended from an Arab tribesman on his or her father’s side.” Among Khurasani revolutionaries it had a narrower meaning: “a bigoted member of the Umayyad establishment who ascribed religious and political significance to his descent.” In the early Abbasid period, the term was often broadened to include anyone “who professed Islam, spoke Arabic (well or badly) and saw himself as a member of the polity ruled by the caliph.” In this latter sense, one could even speak of Arabs “who were Iranian by descent.”⁶

In her studies of Arab and Iranian responses to the Islamic conquests, Professor Crone has also been attentive to the ways in which the set of persons designated by a particular ethnonym may lose certain attributes and acquire new ones. In “Post-Colonialism in Tenth-Century Islam,” she argues that the many non-Arabs who had converted to Islam “were in the disagreeable position of owing their innermost convictions to people they disliked.” Initially, the *shu‘ubiyya* had responded to this predicament by offering new universalist histories of Islam and downplaying the contributions of the Arabs. Later, even though ethnicity had ceased to matter as much on the ground, the search continued for a religious stance that was not bound up with a particular political regime. Skepticism, relativism, and messianism all flourished for a time, but eventually Sufism, which legitimized the spiritual experience of ordinary believers, emerged triumphant.⁷ In “Imperial Trauma: The Case of the Arabs,” she argues that in becoming conquerors, the Arabs lost what they most valued about themselves. Try as they might, they could neither shun the cultures of the subject peoples nor prevent non-Arab converts from adopting theirs. The creative synthesis that followed upon the formation of the Islamic empire, as

⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 16–21.

⁵ Patricia Crone (personal communication). She notes that Bābak referred to Muslims as *yahūd* for the same reason: both (he thought) believed in a distant god who issued “an endless stream of restrictive rules” (Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 273).

⁶ Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 74–5.

⁷ Crone, “Post-Colonialism,” citations at 12 and 15.

admirable as it may seem to us, offered them no consolation for the loss of their ancestral ways.⁸

All these studies address, albeit indirectly, the question of how we have come to apply the ethnonyms we do and whether those terms mean the same thing now as they have at various times in the past.⁹ By showing that being an Arab or an Iranian meant one thing in, say, 600 CE and another in 1000, Professor Crone exposes some of the ways in which ethnic identity is historically contingent. In so doing, she places herself among those historians of Islam who think that the labels “Arab”¹⁰ and “Iranian”¹¹ are not explanations but problems in themselves.¹²

In other fields, a certain suspicion of ethnic terms has long been axiomatic. In their work on the construction of ethnic communities in early medieval

- 8 Crone, “Imperial Trauma.” A pioneering study of this creative synthesis is Amīn, *Duhā*, which despite its seemingly essentialist view of ethnicity, concludes with a discussion of Islamic civilization as a blend of cultures (*imtiyāz al-thaqāfāt*; 1:373–408). I thank A. I. Sabra for first bringing this work to my attention.
- 9 The seminal study is Barth, “Introduction,” which argues that ethnic identity is fashioned contrastively and on the basis of differentiation that change over time. On pre-modern constructions of ethnicity, see Armstrong’s *Nations* and Smith’s *Ethnic Origins*. Both are more inclined than Barth to believe in a sense of community that exists prior to self-differentiation on the basis of contact with others. Both also devote considerable attention to the apparent distinctiveness of ancient Iranian national feeling.
- 10 Crone, *Slaves*, esp. 24–5, argues for a longstanding distinctiveness, while Hoyland’s *Arabia* suggests that the liberal application of the term “Arab” after the conquests creates the impression of a homogeneity that had not existed before. More recently, Retsö, *Arabs*, has argued that no one modern definition stands up to scrutiny, and that the originally distinctive properties of the Arabs were altogether different than the ones familiar to us today.
- 11 For an orientation see Ashraf, “Iranian Identity I” and “Iranian Identity III.” On “Persians” see especially Fragner, *Persophonie* (I thank Christine Nölle-Karimi for this reference). By discussing regional and linguistic affiliations rather than ethnic self-identification, Fragner avoids the pitfalls of traditional essentialist scholarship, arguing (for example) that the spread of Neo-Persian, far from signaling resistance to Muslim hegemony, was predicated on, and promoted, the further dissemination of Islam. For a similarly sensitive discussion of the limits of Iranian identity among the Buyids, see Mottahedeh, “Idea of Iran”: the Buyids’ self-identification as Iranian kings did not entail the cultivation of Neo-Persian literary culture.
- 12 A recent discussion is that of Morony, “Religious Communities,” which argues that during the early Abbasid period, while ethnicity served “as a category for group identity,” it was institutionalized only in the army and that “the long-term trend . . . was for religion to become the primary basis for a person’s identity” (156–7).

Europe, for example, Walter Pohl and his colleagues have argued that modern notions of such peoples as the Goths and the Lombards have arisen from a particular perspective – in this case, the Roman one. The imperial practice of dividing “barbarians” into “peoples” defined by common ancestry, distinctive weapons and dress, and the like, gave those barbarians a place in the imperial army and in the broader Roman world. But none of the presumed markers of distinction survives under modern scrutiny, whether textual or archeological. Differences in costume, for example, certainly existed, but they seem to have signaled status, not ethnicity. Furthermore, there is little if any evidence that the barbarians themselves agreed with, or were even aware of, the scheme that the Romans had fit them into.¹³

Work like Crone’s and Pohl’s makes it clear that ethnonyms do not refer to stable, primordial attributes of persons or communities. Equally important, they are not constructed out of thin air, either.¹⁴ Rather, they represent an imposition of meaning upon contingent attributes of persons or communities, for particular purposes at a particular time. In other words, ethnicity, as Patrick Geary has argued with reference to medieval Europe, is not “an objective category” but rather “a subjective process by which individuals and groups identified themselves or others within specific situations and for specific purposes.”¹⁵ For this reason, ethnonyms can be, and indeed must be, studied historically. The purpose of such a study is not to retrieve some authentic kernel of Iranianness, Arabness, or whatever, from recalcitrant evidence,¹⁶ but

¹³ Pohl, *Völkerwanderung*, esp. 13–23; Pohl et al., *Strategies*, esp. Pohl, “Telling the Difference,” 1–69. Prof. Crone has pointed out to me that the Arabs, unlike the Goths and the Lombards, had a continuous history going back to ancient times and had long been recognized as a distinct people. For present purposes, however, I am not so much concerned with degrees of distinctiveness as with the underlying epistemological claim: namely, that any statement about distinctiveness participates in the construction of reality, not merely in the documentation of it.

¹⁴ For a critique of existing approaches and a call for studying ethnicity as a cognitive category, see Brubaker, *Ethnicity*, 1–87. I thank Kristen Kao for this reference.

¹⁵ Geary, “Ethnic Identity,” 16.

¹⁶ Fortunately, this is no longer a typical undertaking, though the assumption that such a kernel must exist seems to underlie even such recently published works as Yarshater, “Persian Presence.” A similar assumption seems often to underlie work on the Abbasid revolution. To take one example: as Elad has shown, there were fighting units from Khurasan who referred to themselves, or were referred to, as Arabs (Elad, “Ethnic Composition” and “*Mawālī*”). Yet the use of the term amounts only to a claim about self-understanding and social location (on these terms see Brubaker, *Ethnicity*, 41ff.). It does not make the people involved identical with all the other members of the abstract category “Arabs,” nor does it exclude them from belonging to, or acting with, other categories or groups. (Here I have

rather to reconstruct what being Arab or Iranian meant for those who used the terms at any given moment. “Ethnicity,” as Rogers Brubaker has so memorably put it, is “a key part of what we want to explain, not what we want to explain things *with*.¹⁷

In this essay, I would like to consider responses to a phenomenon that threatens to unravel any particular construction of ethnicity: the fact that human beings are capable of acquiring many of the attributes assumed to be specific to any self-declared ethnic community. Under the right circumstances, a child will acquire the cultural practices of those around him, regardless of his own biological heritage. For example, he will acquire whatever language is spoken around him, and – again, under the right circumstances – speak it as well as ancestral members of the group. Similarly, if raised in a household where particular religious rites are normative, he will come to regard them as natural, even if he is the first in his immediate family to acquire them. But if, for whatever reason, it remains important for someone to insist that, despite his perfect mastery of language, ritual, and the like, the child is not fully a member of the group, a struggle ensues: not only over the child’s place in society, but also over the definition of the group itself.

Obviously, these issues have arisen wherever distinct communities have come into intimate contact with one another. Here, I will consider one very limited case: that of Arabs and Iranians in the early Abbasid period. I will begin with a look at the career of Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣili, who illustrates the ways in which non-Arabs could acquire the supposedly distinctive attributes of the Arabs. I will then look at the ways in which Arabs responded to this loss of distinctiveness. Finally, I will turn to the history of the world as recounted by al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956). To a certain extent, his universal history – like all universal histories in the pre-modern Arabic tradition – is Islamic-triumphalist. As it turns out, though, the triumphalism in this case is tempered by a realization that the *umma*, the very thing that makes such a story possible, cannot remain identical to itself forever.

2 Indeterminacy and Imposture

According to the conventional account, having an Arab father made one an Arab; having an Arab mother and a non-Arab father made one a *hajīn* or

in mind Brubaker’s distinction between *groups*, which are bounded entities that act, and *categories*, which are cognitive entities; *ibid.*, 12–13).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

“hybrid.”¹⁸ One who spuriously claimed Arab ancestry was a *daī*, and such impostors were met with contempt and ridicule.¹⁹ A person of non-Arab parentage might convert to Islam through patronage, but could aspire to no higher status than that of *mawlā*.²⁰ As far as I can tell from the biographical sources, however, the situation allowed for self-positionings more nuanced than these flatly stated rules imply. A case in point is that of the singer Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣili (b. 125/742 or 743, d. 188/803 or 804).²¹ According to his biographers, Ibrāhīm’s family came from Arrajān in Fārs.²² His father Māhān belonged to “a noble house among the non-Arabs” and his mother was “a daughter of the *dahāqīn*.” Driven off his land by a rapacious Umayyad tax collector, Māhān moved to Kufa, where he settled “among ‘Abd Allāh b. Dārim,” that is, in the quarter where members of that clan and their clients lived.²³ According to one report, Māhān was a client of the Banū Ḥanẓalah, whose estates he managed.²⁴ He is said to have entered into a relationship of *radā‘* (exchange of nurslings) with an Arab named Naḍla b. Nu‘aym al-Nahshalī, who took charge of Ibrāhīm. Soon afterwards, Māhān died in a plague. According to one report, the family of Khuzayma b. Khāzim – prominent Tamīmīs descended from one of the Abbasids’ best-known military commanders²⁵ – took charge of the boy (*kafalahu*). Ibrāhīm later attended *kuttāb* (Qur‘ān school) with Khuzayma’s children. “I grew up among them,” he is quoted as saying. “We had a relationship

¹⁸ Amīn, *Duḥā*, 1:19–27.

¹⁹ Goldziher, “Arab,” 125–34.

²⁰ For a spectrum of recent work on *walā‘* and *mawlā*, see Bernards and Nawas, *Patronate*. Of particular interest is Bulliet’s “Conversion-Based Patronage,” which demolishes the traditional understanding that becoming Muslim entailed a face-to-face patron–client relationship.

²¹ Al-Īṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, 5:1798–1904 [5/2–52]; Al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 157–8 (*fann* 3, *maqāla* 3); al-Khaṭīb, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, 6:173–5 (= no. 323); Kilpatrick, “Ibrahim.” I have also consulted a typescript German translation of the *Aghānī* entry by Eckhart Neubauer, kindly supplied to me by Dwight Reynolds. The discussion of Ibrāhīm in Zakerī, *Sāsānid Soldiers*, 307, contains several misstatements. The story of his having been a bandit is unlikely: al-Īṣfahānī discounts it and the *ṣa‘ālik* of Mosul were pious Arab *khārijīs*, not jolly bands of *fityān* (see Robinson, *Empire*, 109–26). No source mentions that Ibrāhīm fled to Rayy “to escape the ceaseless demands of his friends,” or that Jāvānūyeh was a nobleman, or that Ibrāhīm learned from him (in fact, the *Aghānī* says just the opposite).

²² Al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 157.

²³ Al-Īṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, 5:1798 [5/2–3].

²⁴ Al-Khaṭīb, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, 6:174. It is unclear whether this relationship is supposed to have begun while the family was still in Fārs or only after their move to Kufa, though the former scenario might better explain why the refugees chose to settle where they did.

²⁵ Jāhīz, *Bukhalā’*, ed. Hājirī, 352–3.

of *radā'* and through that connection they took us on as clients" (*tawallawna bi-hādha s-sabab*).²⁶

These reports about Ibrāhīm's childhood disagree on certain important details, such as the precise identity of the family's patrons. But they do shed some light on the mechanisms and consequences of *walā'*. The father, Māhān, does not seem to have converted to Islam: at least, no conversion is mentioned, and he does not seem to have acquired a Muslim name until one was invented for him posthumously, as we will see in a moment. But his son Ibrāhīm was raised as a Muslim, as is clear from the reference to attending Qur'ān school.²⁷ He was also raised as a native speaker of Arabic, or so we may infer from his living among Arabs from infancy.²⁸ He knew Persian, too, as he is later described as studying "Persian and Arabic song." But all the songs cited in the *Aghānī*, including one composed for his presumably Persian-speaking wife Doshār, are in Arabic.²⁹

As a result of his upbringing, Ibrāhīm bore the external markers of membership in the Muslim community. Describing his first meeting with a singer named Javānūyeh, he reports that the man, upon seeing him in the street, "displayed deference to me; he was a Zoroastrian."³⁰ The fact that the two men could identify one another before either spoke a word indicates that members of different communities could identify each other by dress or grooming.³¹ Clearly,

²⁶ Al-Isfahānī, *Aghānī*, 5:1799–800 [5/3]. The family's affiliation with Khāzim b. Khuzayma may be a back-projection based on a later incident; see *ibid.*, 5:1922 [5/56].

²⁷ If many first-generation Muslims were raised as such from infancy, as Ibrāhīm apparently was, we may have a partial explanation for the dearth of conversion stories in early Abbasid biography (Bulliet, "Conversion Stories"). Zoroastrian writings suggest that infantile "conversion" was common: see de Menasce, "Problèmes," citing the ninth- or tenth-century *Rivāyat i Emēt i Ashavahishtān*, where rules are given for how to treat a member of the community raised as a Muslim from birth (226), "a man born into the bad religion" (227), "people of the bad religion, who received their bad religion through inheritance" (227–8), and children "who reach the age of fifteen while remaining in the bad religion" (229).

²⁸ Unfortunately we have few reports of how children from Persian-speaking families learned Arabic. We are told that Ibn al-Muqaffa's father took pains to have him properly trained in the language (al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 218; I thank István Kristó-Nagy for providing me with this text). When 'ajam with literary pretensions had accents, the fact was noted: see van Gelder's fascinating discussion of the poets Ziyād al-A'jam (d. ca 100/718) and Abū 'Atā' al-Sindi (d. before 158/775 or after 180/796) in "Mawālī," 353ff.

²⁹ Al-Isfahānī, *Aghānī*, 5:1802 [5/3].

³⁰ *Lammā ra'ānī ḥtashamanī wa-kāna majūsiyyān*; *ibid.*, 5:1803 [5/4].

³¹ Javānūyeh may have been wearing the sacred girdle and vest of the Zoroastrians; see Choksy, *Conflict*, 89 and 132; on cutting the girdle upon conversion, see Abū Nu'aym,

then, Ibrāhīm looked like a Muslim. But did he look like an Arab? Perhaps he did: his older contemporary Bashshār b. Burd (d. 167/783–4), also a *mawlā*, looked and sounded so much like an Arab that people had to ask what he was.³² Unfortunately, we do not have an account of Ibrāhīm’s first meeting with his Arab patron, Muḥammad b. Sulaymān b. ‘Alī, a member of the Abbasid house. But we are told that Muḥammad, in the course of persuading him to join his entourage, asked him where he was from.³³ In response, Ibrāhīm claimed to be from Mosul (*intasabtu ilā l-Mawṣil*). This is odd response, since he had spent only a little time in northern Iraq. According to one report, he had acquired the name when, upon his return, he was hailed by a Kufan friend as “the fellow from Mosul.” Given, however, his particular situation, the name made as much sense as any other: it signaled that he was a *mawlā*, since Arabs identified themselves by tribes rather than cities.³⁴ The fact that his connection to Mosul was a tenuous one seems not to have mattered at all: nowhere in his long biography in the *Aghānī* does anyone accuse him of trying to pass himself off as Mawṣilī. Indeed, his choice of an arbitrary *nisba* was the opposite of an imposture: it was a way to explain what he was without having to spell it out to everyone he met.

The closest Ibrāhīm comes to real imposture is when he changes his father’s name posthumously from Māhān to Maymūn. Ibrāhīm’s biographers quote him as recalling that he one day wrote a letter to a friend and signed it “Ibrāhīm son of Māhān.” A *fatā* who had evidently been peeking at the letter asked him why he wasn’t ashamed of the (Persian) name Māhān. Ibrāhīm replied that it was his father’s name. His friend replied that he should change it. “How would

Hilyah, 10:40 (I thank William Sherman for this reference). Goldziher (“Arab,” 128, note 6), has compiled a few references to the distinctive appearance of the Persians, most involving facial hair.

32 Asked how he was faring under the new Abbasid regime, an old man recited: “With most people, you can’t tell / when you meet them, what sort they are. // Garments are spread out, then folded away / and cowls are bought and resold at a higher price // To the slave of a slave or the *mawlā* of a *mawlā* . . .” (al-Īṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, 18/138, cited in Amīn, *Duhā*, 1:41). Cohen has shown that in Late Antiquity, Jews looked, dressed, and spoke like everyone else, had the same names, and pursued the same professions. They could not even be reliably distinguished by their ritual observances, since gentiles sometimes joined them (*Beginnings*, 25–68; I thank Steven Weitzman for this reference).

33 Al-Īṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, 5:1803 [5/3]. This is the sort of question one would ask a *mawlā*, not an Arab, but this does not mean that Ibrāhīm was immediately recognizable as such. By the time he asked the question, Muḥammad b. Sulaymān had already heard about Ibrāhīm from others.

34 Mottahedeh, “Shu‘ubiyah,” 167ff.

I do that?" asked Ibrāhīm. The *fatā* responded by taking the letter, rubbing out "Māhān," and in its place writing the Arab name Maymūn.³⁵ If this is imposture, it is imposture of a very tentative kind. Since the friend to whom he was writing doubtless knew his real name, Ibrāhīm can hardly be accused of trying to deceive him. Rather, he seems to be sending a signal that he wants to be treated differently: not as an Arab, but as someone whose father converted to Islam (when, as far as I can tell, he did not). In any case, the imposture is not presented as the result of cynical calculation on Ibrāhīm's part. Rather, the story depicts him as giving in to promptings of his friend. As he did when questioned by his patron, Ibrāhīm adopts a new name because people expect him to identify himself in a certain way, not because of any initial intention on his part to fool anyone.

Ibrāhīm's experience may not be typical of *mawālī* in general. But his career illustrates how it was possible for Zoroastrian Persians of the *dihqān* class to produce children who were born Muslims and raised as native speakers of Arabic. As adults, such children appear to have been indistinguishable at first glance from Muslim Arabs. Confronted with such people, the "genuine" Arabs of our sources are baffled. Seeing Bashshār at a gathering, a desert Arab (*a'rābī*) asked, "Who's that?" "A poet," he was told, as if by someone who hoped to deflect the question that came next. But the *a'rābī* persisted: "Is he a *mawlā* or an Arab?"³⁶ In another encounter, we hear Bashshār's necessarily complicated account of himself. Asked by the caliph al-Mahdī "Where do you belong?" Bashshār replied, "My speech and dress are Arab, but my origin is *'ajamī*."³⁷

The fact that such treasured marks of identity as language and religion could be effortlessly acquired by anyone fortunate enough to be exposed to them in childhood must have been gratifying to those who wished to see all mankind share in God's religion and the Prophet's language.³⁸ At the same time, the promiscuity of those very attainments must have been disturbing. Even today, the ease with which children can acquire any set of cultural attributes is disruptive of our sense of natural categories.³⁹ Wherever and whenever one ethnic group dominates another, furthermore, the promiscuity of cultural markers

³⁵ Al-İşfahānī, *Ağhānī*, 5:1798 [5/2].

³⁶ Al-İşfahānī, *Ağhānī*, 3:1012–13 [3/33]; also discussed in Goldziher, "Arab," 115.

³⁷ Al-İşfahānī, *Ağhānī*, 3:984 [3/21].

³⁸ On the arguments for religious and social equality, and how they were tamed, see Marlow, *Hierarchy*, 13–41 and 93–116.

³⁹ A modern example is that of Wonho Chung, a Korean-Vietnamese comedian whose first language is Arabic: see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pbghb3CbCK8>.

becomes a scandal: that is, it threatens to undermine the basis on which one group claims superiority to the other.

In terms of the dichotomies available to them, and to us, figures like Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī and Bašshār ibn Burd cannot properly be labeled except as *mawālī*, a term that precisely says nothing categorical about religion or ethnicity. Their interlocutors’ insistence that such figures identify themselves may be understood as attempts to manage and regulate the anxiety generated by the uncanny alchemy of cultural transformation. The problem was not simply that ‘*ajam*⁴⁰ could become indistinguishable from ‘*arab*: it was also that ‘*arab* could, with disconcerting ease, lose what made them special. Thus we find numerous treatises specifying what those special characteristics are – treatises which, of course, made it all the easier for ‘*ajam* to acquire them. Al-Jāḥīz’s insistence on the spontaneity and genuineness of Arabic compositions as opposed to the studied and artificial character of Persian ones – an insistence brilliantly anatomized by Suzanne Enderwitz – seems to be another way of arguing that being a native Arabic speaker made one more eloquent than someone who had acquired the language through study.⁴¹ But, as al-Jāḥīz himself doubtless knew, native proficiency could be acquired by anyone, provided he or she was exposed to the language at a sufficiently early age, and for a long enough period of time. No doubt it would have been convenient to argue that eloquence somehow ran in the blood, but al-Jāḥīz was too clear-eyed an observer to hazard such an easily refuted claim. To refute it, indeed, one need look no further than his own often-quoted description of the entertainers who can imitate the cries of animals so skillfully that even the animals are fooled.⁴²

3 Arab Panic

Just as the Arab religion and the Arabic language could be acquired by others, Arabs and Muslims, too, might acquire the distinctive traits of other peoples. This possibility seems to have been a frightening one. After his death in 241/855, Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal is said to have appeared in a dream to his associate

⁴⁰ Originally, those who speak Arabic badly, or not at all, and often during this period, a pejorative term for Iranians. The social distinction and its literary manifestations are surveyed in Goldziher, “Arab.” The manifestation of the dichotomy in Arabic linguistics is brilliantly deconstructed by Ayoub, “L’autre” and “Un idiome,” which show that the terms function less as documentation of some external reality than as foils for each other.

⁴¹ Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang*, esp. 136–84.

⁴² Al-Jāḥīz, *Bayān*, 1:69–70.

Ibrāhīm ibn Ishāq al-Ḥarbī, who had been working on a book about the Prophet Muḥammad. When Aḥmad praised him for his labors, al-Ḥarbī (d. 285/898) replied that he was only trying to repay the debt he owed the Prophet: “If not for him we’d be Magians: after all, we were born among ‘ajam, not Arabs.”

“Magians?” cries Aḥmad, appalled. Twice more he repeats the word, then faints away.⁴³

Al-Ḥarbī’s claim is a striking one. Had God not sent Muḥammad with the message of Islam, the people of Khurasan would still be Zoroastrians. Among the people thus saved al-Ḥarbī clearly includes himself. His family history is difficult to untangle, but he seems to have been a descendant of a Khurasani convert to Islam⁴⁴ (though his mother was a Taglibiyya from a Christian family).⁴⁵ But what about Aḥmad? Why does he faint? Clearly, he is appalled at the thought of the Khurasanis’ narrow escape. Possibly, too, he thinks of himself as one of them. Though a descendant of Shaybānī Arabs on both sides, he too was raised among ‘ajam. After settling in Basra, his family moved to Marv. He himself did not grow up there: after his father’s untimely death, his mother, who was then pregnant with him, left Khurasan for Baghdad, where he was born. Even so, he grew up knowing Persian. When a maternal cousin came from Khurasan to visit him in Baghdad, he “several times had trouble understanding things in Arabic and so [Aḥmad] would speak to him in Persian”

43 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 605 (where a variant also appears). Ibrāhīm’s remark runs: *Kayfa lā ukhriju faḍḍā’ilahu wa-lawlā huwa [sic] la-kunnā Majūsan? Innamā wulidnā bayna l-‘ajam; lam nūlad bayna l-‘arab.*

44 His full name is Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Bashīr ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Daysam al-Marwazī (al-Khaṭīb, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, 6:27 [no. 3059]; Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, 1:70 [no. 6]). Al-Ṭabarī mentions a certain ‘Abd Allāh b. Daysam al-‘Anazi as fighting in Khurasan during the Abbasid revolution (*Ta’rīkh* 3:341 [2/1934], *sub anno* 128; I thank Amikam Elad for this reference). If this were al-Ḥarbī’s ancestor, though, one would expect him to have retained the tribal *nisba*. Of the other names in al-Ḥarbī’s *nasab*, Ibrāhīm and Ishāq were favored by Iranian Muslims who claimed descent from Abraham and Isaac (Savant, “Isaac”; cf. Bulliet, *Conversion*, 68). Daysam (misvoweled in al-Khaṭīb) is an Arabic name (Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*, s.v. DSM), but it is just the sort of unusual name that Bulliet tells us is characteristic of those who converted before certain common names (Muḥammad, al-Ḥasan, and the like) became standard (*Conversion*, 67–8). The use of geographical *nisbas* like al-Marwazī rather than a tribal name was characteristic of Iranian *mawālī* (Mottahedeh, “Shu’ūbiyah,” 167ff.). The biographies give an unconvincing explanation of his other *nisba*, al-Ḥarbī, but the relevant point for us is that the Ḥarbiyya quarter of Baghdad was “populated almost entirely by people of Iranian origin” (Patricia Crone, personal communication).

45 Al-Khaṭīb, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, 6:28 [no. 3059]. On marriage between *mawālī* and Arab women see Goldziher, “Arab,” 120–5.

(*bi l-fārisiyya*).⁴⁶ There is no evidence that Ahmād ever wanted to learn the language, or that he or anyone else thought that knowing it was a worthy accomplishment.⁴⁷ Rather, he appears to have picked it up because the members of his household were immigrants who spoke it at home. Despite his impeccable genealogy, then, Ahmād had acquired precisely that attribute that made an ‘ajamī what he was: the use of a language other than Arabic.⁴⁸

When, in the dream story, al-Ḥarbī points out that being raised among ‘ajam might easily have meant becoming a Zoroastrian, Ahmād – or, more precisely, the dream version of him that appears in the story – seems to realize that one might have acquired Zoroastrianism as easily and unthinkingly as he acquired Persian. It is this realization that fills him with dread. His contemporary Bishr al-Ḥāfi (d. 227/841–2) reportedly saw things the same way. When his sister asked him why he had spent the night so deep in thought that he had forgotten to shut the door and come inside, he replied: “I was thinking about Bishr the Christian, Bishr the Jew, Bishr the Magian, and me, who’s a Bishr too, and asking myself, ‘What have you done that [God] should have favored you so?’ ”⁴⁹ Like al-Ḥarbī, Bishr is certain that being born into the right community is an unaccountable act of divine grace. Like him, too, he is appalled at how easily things might have gone the wrong way.

Dismayed by the *mawālī*’s ability to acquire the characteristic traits of the Arabs, and now uncomfortably aware – as the dream story suggests – of the contingent nature of *any* identity, the Arabs not surprisingly fell back on the only criterion of self-identification that seemed immutable: genealogy, specifically paternal descent. Ahmād’s relatives are said to have described him as follows:

Ahmād son of Muḥammad son of Ḥanbal son of Hilāl son of Asad son of Idrīs son of ‘Abd Allāh son of Ḥayyān son of ‘Abd Allāh son of Anas son of ‘Awf son of Qāsiṭ son of Māzin son of Shaybān son of Dhuhl son of Tha’labā son of ‘Ukāba son of Sha'b son of ‘Alī son of Bakr son of Wā'il son

⁴⁶ *Rubbamā sta'jama sh-shay'u 'alā Abī Ahmād fa-yukallimuhu jaddī bi l-Fārisiyā* (Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 297).

⁴⁷ When the Syrian Arab poet al-Attābī revealed his knowledge of it, his interlocutor exclaimed “What have you to do with that gibberish?” (Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, *Bağhdād*, 87; on him see further Amīn, *Duhā*, 1:180–1). On *raṭāna* see Ayoub, “L’autre,” 38–40.

⁴⁸ According to al-Suyūṭī, the early scholars of Arabic would accept no usage from the speech of tribes who lived in proximity to speakers of other languages. Ayoub, “L’autre,” 19–20.

⁴⁹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, 2:187.

of Qāsiṭ son of Hinb son of Afṣā son of Du‘mī son of Jadīla son of Asad son of Rabī‘a son of Nizār son of Ma‘add son of ‘Adnān son of Udd son of Udad son of al-Hamaysa‘ son of Ḥamal son of al-Nabt son of Qaydhār son of Ismā‘il son of Abraham, the Friend of God.⁵⁰

This strikes me as a hysterical performance: a torrent of names intended to banish the scandalous fact that Ibn Ḥanbal could not simply be recognized for what he was. And this particular genealogy of course only makes matters worse. By going all the way back to the Abraham of the Bible and the Qur‘ān, it illustrates the equally scandalous fact that genealogies could be fabricated. Stretched, as it is here, to impossible lengths, Aḥmad’s *nasab* is as much an imposture as “Ibrāhīm ibn Maymūn al-Mawṣili.”

4 Al-Mas‘ūdī

For people like al-Ḥarbī and Bashshār’s *a‘rābī*, the malleability of identity (limited though it may have been) violated the expectation that Arabs and non-Arabs should be easily distinguished from each other. This expectation was rooted in the general assumption that God had divided human beings into nations, each of which possessed its own distinctive characteristics. The Arabs, according to expressions of this view, possess virtues such as eloquence; the Persians excel at statecraft; the Turks at mounted warfare, and so on.⁵¹ Of the various authors who propose such classifications, al-Mas‘ūdī is the most forthcoming about the possibility that members of one group may be turned into, or turn themselves into, members of another. Unlike the biographers, however, he is not concerned with “clever manoeuvres of individual importance,” as Goldziher called them,⁵² but rather with the fate of nations.

For al-Mas‘ūdī, as for other universal historians, the term for people, nation, or community is *umma*. In one place, he defines an *umma* as a group of people who have common physical and moral traits and a common language.⁵³ Elsewhere he says that each of the ancient nations was distinguished from the

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 16.

⁵¹ For an overview based on al-Jāhīz, see Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang*, 5–85. A lively discussion of the *umam* appears in al-Tawḥīdī, *Imtā‘*, 1:70–104; tr. van Gelder, *Classical*, 195–207, with further references (386, note 500).

⁵² Goldziher, “*Arab*,” 134.

⁵³ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 77.

others by having its own king and its own form of worship.⁵⁴ In yet another place, he says that each *umma* has its own history: that is, its own memory of great events.⁵⁵ With these criteria in mind, he offers several different lists of the major *umam* of ancient and modern times. In one place, for example, he names the Persians, the Chaldeans or Assyrians, the Greeks, along with the Slavs and the Franks, the Egyptians, the Turks, the Indians, and the Chinese.⁵⁶ Elsewhere he also speaks of the Yemenis or South Arabians and of the Arabs as nations.⁵⁷ However defined and enumerated, the *umam* are the protagonists of universal history. But writing about them is difficult, largely because an *umma*’s attributes are always in flux.

It seems obvious that the members of an *umma* have a common ancestor. But what if the nation’s representatives disagree over who he is? Most Persian tradents, for example, agree that their *umma* descended from one Īraj (or Īrān), the son of Afrīdūn. Other tradents add that Īraj is identical to Isaac, the son of Abraham. But then some accounts say that the patriarch was not Īraj but Shem, the son of Noah. Yet others name Joseph and others again claim Lot. Al-Mas‘ūdī is clearly aware that the Persians – along with everyone else – harmonize old genealogies or invent new ones to meet political and social needs. He does not condemn this practice, but he does complain that it makes it more difficult to reconstruct the real history of an *umma*.⁵⁸

Another defining characteristic, language, is equally subject to change over time. The Zoroastrians, for example, no longer understand the language of the Avesta because it is written in *al-Fahlawīyya*, “Pahlavi” or *al-fārisīyya al-ūlā*, “ancient Persian,” as opposed to *hādhīhi l-fārisīyya*, “the language used now.”⁵⁹ The Byzantines, similarly, speak a language called *al-rūmīyya*, but write scholarly works in an older language, the one spoken by the ancient Greeks (*al-yūnāniyūn*).⁶⁰ And the ancient Egyptians wrote in hieroglyphs but their descendants, the Copts, use an alphabet derived from Greek, and can no longer explain the original meaning of common words like *fīr‘awn*.⁶¹

54 Ibid., 84.

55 Ibid., 196–7.

56 Ibid., 85ff.

57 Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, sections 993ff. (2:158ff.).

58 Ibid., sections 563–75 (1:278–84); al-Mas‘ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 7, 38, 77–8, 108–9, 182. Savant argues that al-Mas‘ūdī accepted the descent from Isaac as “one of several possible explanations for the Persians’ origins” (“Isaac,” 10).

59 Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 91–2.

60 Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, section 664 (2:5–6).

61 Ibid., sections 793 (2:78) and 822 (2:95).

A third distinctive property of nations, religion, may also change. Indeed, such change seems to be the rule. The ancient Greeks worshipped the stars and planets, and the ancient Egyptians worshipped idols, but both nations have now become Christian.⁶² The ancient Arabs held a variety of beliefs. Some believed in God and His prophets and others in God but not the prophets; some worshipped angels and others idols.⁶³ As for the Persians, they were once adherents of paganism (*al-hanīfiyya al-ūlā al-ṣābi'a*).⁶⁴ Under their first dynasty of kings, they became Zoroastrians. But then Alexander the Great destroyed their kingdom and burned many of their scriptures. The ancient tradition was restored by Ardashir, but on the basis of many fewer texts.⁶⁵ Later, some Persians adopted the teachings of Mani⁶⁶ or of Mazdak.⁶⁷

From the recasting of genealogies, the changes in language, and the adoption of new religions, it follows that an *umma* might cease to exist as a separate entity. This is what happened to the *umma* of the Chaldeans, also known as the Assyrians, Nabateans, or Babylonians. Once a great nation, they were conquered by the Persians. As a result, they lost their distinctive identity. As al-Mas'ūdī puts it, they "entered into the collectivity" of the Persians: *dakhalū fi jumlatihim*.⁶⁸ In other words, they were not simply assimilated to but actually absorbed by the Persian *umma*. To be sure, there are some remnants of a Chaldean heritage, including the Syriac language and some villagers in the lands between Wāsiṭ and Basra.⁶⁹ But the Chaldeans are no longer a nation in their own right. He uses the same expression when speaking of the ancient Greeks, who, he says, *dakhalū fi jumlat al-rūm*, "entered into the collectivity of the Byzantines."⁷⁰

What about the Persians? Originally, they were a great nation: like the Indians, they had founded a republic of virtue without help from divine

62 See, for example, *ibid.*, sections 741 (2:45–6, on the bad effect of Christianity on the Greeks) and 826 (2:98, relics as proof that the ancient Egyptians were not monotheists).

63 *Ibid.*, section 1122–5 (2:253–4).

64 On the meaning of these terms see Crone, "Buddhism," esp. 27–9.

65 *Ibid.*, sections 547–50 (1:270–2) and 1373 (2:381); al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 90–4.

66 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, sections 589–94 (1:290–2); al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 101.

67 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 101; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, sections 615–18 (1:304–5).

68 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 38.

69 *Ibid.*, 177 and 161.

70 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, sections 7 (1:12), 115 (1:68–9), 183 (1:96), 188 (1:99–100). The account of India suggests that its people, too, had changed over time: he calls the ancient Indians *Barāhima*, "Brahmins," whereas the modern ones are simply *al-Hind*, "the Indians" (*Ibid.*, sections 152–168 [1:84–91]).

revelation:⁷¹ “Their territory was vast, their history long, their dynastic succession unbroken, their administration efficient, their lands prosperous, and their subjects well cared for.”⁷² Unfortunately, their later kings sinned against the very principles that made them strong. Bahram II, for example, expropriated the property of land-owning families; Hurmuz IV persecuted the nobility; and Abarvīz deposed his father and executed his own advisers.⁷³ After that, it was only a matter of time before their kingdom succumbed to Islam. In his time, 200 years after the Arab conquest, al-Mas‘ūdī can say of the Persians that “their history has been effaced, their achievements have been forgotten, and their traditions have lapsed, all because of the passage of time and the rush of events.”⁷⁴ Just as, centuries before, the Chaldeans disappeared into the collectivity of Persians, and the Greeks into that of the Byzantines, the Persians too have melted away.⁷⁵

But into what? Not into the *umma* of the Arabs, who have melted away themselves.⁷⁶ Both, rather, have “entered into” the new *umma* of Islam. That al-Mas‘ūdī sees things this way is evident from the ethnonyms he uses. When he speaks of ancient times, he refers to the Persians as *al-furs*. Speaking of the conquests, he (or his sources) begin to call the same people ‘*ajam*. Thus designated, they lose their distinctive character, and exist only as the “not-Arabs.” As for the Arabs, they are, in ancient times, the ‘*arab*, but as they set about their conquests, they are sometimes called ‘*arab* and sometimes *muslimūn*.⁷⁷ As the latter category is one that Iranians and others can join, the term *muslimūn* soon comes to apply to Arabs and Persians alike. More exactly, it becomes the term to use when one wishes not to say anything about ethnicity. What we have, then, is not the dissolution of one people into another, but rather the

71 Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography*, 60–70, 81–113.

72 Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 6.

73 For detailed references see my “Mas‘udi” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

74 Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 105.

75 A similar conclusion is reached by a representative of the Iranian side, the author of the undated Pahlavi “Memorial of Jāmāsp”: “And for that reason Ēran-šahr will be delivered up to the Tāzigs [i.e., the Arabs] . . . And the non-Iranian and the Iranian will be ‘mixed,’ so that being Iranian will not be distinguished from being non-Iranian; the Iranians will take to ‘non-Iranian ways.’” Cited in Vevaina, “Miscegenation,” 256, with further references.

76 Or, as Prof. Crone puts it: “The ruling elite still seemed to consist of Arabs; it is simply that, some well-known families apart, they were not the same Arabs any more” (“Imperial Trauma,” 111).

77 See, for example, al-Mas‘ūdī, *Muřij*, section 1530 (3:50–1), which includes ‘*ajam*, ‘*arab*, *furs*, and *muslimūn*.

creation of a new *umma* out of both together. Once that *umma* takes center stage, al-Mas'ūdī ceases to speak of Arabs or Persians except as ancient peoples.

Al-Mas'ūdī's account might be read as triumphalist. As it turns out, though, he did not think the Muslim *umma* had any special privileges, at least not in this world. And indeed, by his own time, Islam seemed to be headed down the same path as the great nations of ages past. Describing what Professor Crone, following Fazlur Rahman, calls "the tenth-century crisis," he writes that:

every [leader] has a patch of territory he calls his own, which he defends and seeks to enlarge, while all around, people have stopped building, roads are no longer passable, entire regions have become uninhabited, provinces fall away, and Byzantines and slave soldiers hold sway over the frontiers of Islam and many of its cities.⁷⁸

This passage admits that the Muslim *umma*, though perhaps once as virtuous as that of the Persians, may now be going the way of its ancient predecessors. Mournful as it is, this insight does bear out his conception of the *umma* as a collectivity whose attributes are constantly in flux.

This is not to say that al-Mas'ūdī was a thoroughgoing pessimist. As it happens, he was a believer in the cumulative and progressive nature of both human knowledge and divine revelation.⁷⁹ No doubt, he must have wondered what would happen next in the history of the *umam*. The likeliest answer, given his Shī'ī creed, is that he hoped that a new Alid dynasty would arise to renew Islam. Actually, this did happen, though after his death, when the Fatimid dynasty appeared in Egypt. But he may have entertained other possibilities too. At least twice in his surviving works, he mentions the Persian belief that kingship would one day again be theirs. In one place he mentions a series of cryptic prophecies, including:

what the Persians say about the future, and what they await in the days to come, namely the return of kingship to them, and its manifestation among them; and the warnings and omens that will mark this event, such as changes in the stars, and the appearance of their awaited leaders, such as Bahrām Hamāvand, S^{*}shyāvas [Siyāvash?], and others, with their stories; as well as signs, as when the sun will stop for three days...⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 400; Crone, "Post-Colonialism," 18ff.

⁷⁹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 76.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 108.

Rationalist that he was, al-Mas‘ūdī is not likely to have expected the stars to change their courses.⁸¹ But nothing in his vision of human history made it impossible or even improbable that the gains of Islam would be reversed. And indeed, his surviving histories devote a good deal of attention to the uprisings of Bābak, Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim, Mazyār ibn Qārin, Ya‘qūb ibn al-Layth, and Mardawīj.⁸² This list suggests that he expected the great upheaval to come from the east. But that was only in the short term: beyond that, he preferred to leave all the possibilities in play. At the end of the *Tanbīh*, he reports the date on which he completed his work. Normally, Muslim authors date events from the *hijra*. But al-Mas‘ūdī records his date as follows:

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Mas‘ūdī completed this book in Fustat, Egypt, in the year 345 of the *hijra*, during the caliphate of al-Muṭī’. The emperor of the Byzantines is Constantine, the son of Leon. This year corresponds to 1702 according to the calendar of Nebuchadnezzar; 1268 according to the calendar of Alexander, son of Philip, the Greek; 673 according to the calendar of Ardashīr, son of Bābak; and 324 according to the calendar of Yazdigird, son of Shahriyār, son of Kisrā Abarvīz, the last of the kings of Persia. All success is due to God. This *Reference Guide and Overview* is complete, by the grace and favor of God, and with thanks and gratitude to him. Praise is to God alone.⁸³

The use of multiple calendars “was not unusual among the writers of universal histories,” who used them to confirm the accuracy of a particular date, particularly dates given according to a *hijrī* calendar.⁸⁴ Given what he has just been writing about, al-Mas‘ūdī may be thinking not only of readers in his own time but also those in the future. As we know from other passages, he is an author who thought about the fate of his books.⁸⁵ Given his belief in the transience of all human communities, including Islam, he seems here to be preparing for the possibility that, in some remote age, he will have readers who use calendars other than his own. Certainly, his use of six different dating systems amounts

81 For examples of his rationalist thinking, see Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, sections 1003 (2:197–8), 1207 (2:295–6), and 1344 (2:367).

82 For references see Cooperson, “Mas‘udi,” section v. On the revolts themselves see Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 31–188.

83 Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 401.

84 Michael Morony (personal communication).

85 Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, sections 17 (1:18–19) and 3658–9 (5:301–2).

to an admission – intentional or not – that human history, notwithstanding the momentary ascendancy of one or another *umma*, is necessarily polyphonic.

5 Conclusions

In the foregoing I have tried to look at the indeterminacy of identity both as lived experience and as the basis for a theory of history. As far as the lived experience is concerned, we have plenty of anecdotal evidence that eighth- and ninth-century people could acquire markers such as language and religion in such a way as to destabilize any rigid definition of such ethnonyms such as “Arab” and “Iranian” or “Persian.” Sometimes this acquisition was deliberately cultivated, as when *mawālī* took pains to ensure that their children were raised as Arabic-speaking Muslims. In other cases, it was apparently involuntary, and not necessarily welcomed, as when Ahmad ibn Hanbal turns out to have learned Persian. Thus we see that self-identification was partly the result of contingent circumstance and partly the result of willed self-presentation. In one case, at least, this willed self-presentation resulted in what seems to us to be the simplest and most obvious definition of “Arab”: one with Arab ancestry. As we have seen, this particular criterion may have come to the fore as a response to the fact that every other distinctive trait of the Arabs had proven to be transferable. Rather than take any particular definition as normative, we should instead ask how the people involved chose to present themselves and why, and to what extent their contemporaries assented to their claims.

As is evident from the existence of terms like *mawlā* and *ahl Khurāsān*,⁸⁶ the people in our sources were aware that the social world could not always be described using simple terms like ‘arab and ‘ajam, though these were useful enough when vagueness rather than precision was desired. This is not to say that the invention of terms constituted a solution in itself: no matter how precise the terminology applied to it, membership in a particular community could never be taken for granted. That the world should work this way is one of the premises – indeed, I would say, a fundamental premise – of al-Mas‘ūdī’s vision of human history. Surprising as it may seem, there is nothing essentialist in his view of identity. As he tells it, all of the defining traits of national communities – shared origin, language, religion, political organization – change over time. When they change enough, an *umma* may cease to exist. He declares this to be the case with the Chaldeans and the Greeks, and strongly implies

86 For a ninth-century view of the latter see Ibn Qutayba, *Faḍl*, 98ff. I thank Ignacio Sánchez Sánchez for bringing this point to my attention and providing me with a copy of the work.

that the same thing has happened to the Persians. The real protagonist of his universal history is the *umma* of Islam, which subsumes Arabs and Persians both. This *umma* is unlike the others, since it is religious and not ethnic. (The coincidence of terms doubtless allowed him to move effortlessly from talking about the one to talking about the other.) But there is nothing special about the Muslim *umma*: like the others, it is subject to change over time. Moreover, al-Mas‘ūdī appears persuaded that it is now going into decline. As for what comes next, his display of calendrical erudition at the end of the *Tanbīh* suggests that he prefers not to foreclose any of the possibilities.

To all of the above one may object that people cannot be as mutable and dissoluble as all that, since the *umma* of Islam, not to mention the Arabs and the Persians, are still with us. True enough, but if our tiny sample of texts proves anything, it is that these great abstractions have managed to survive by accommodating contingency and in the process becoming something quite different than they were when they started out. It is a truism that the Arabs and Persians of today are hardly the same (whatever that would mean) as those persons of the same names who fought at al-Qādisiyya. Hard on the heels of this truism comes the usual observation that modern peoples are the product of (among many other things) nineteenth-century nationalism, whose premises and preoccupations cannot be projected onto the past. Less often conceded, however, is the point that pre-modern ethnonyms were equally up for grabs, and that every single example of ethnic representation (including self-representation) must be studied on its own. To paraphrase Brubaker, the point is not to explain people by calling them Arabs and Persians, but to explain “Arabs” and “Persians” by studying people.

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The Poetics of Cultural Identity: Al-Mutanabbī among the Būyids

Margaret Larkin

Over the course of his professional life, the poet Abū 'l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965) served a diverse roster of wealthy and influential patrons, including most famously the Ḥamdanid ruler in Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawla, and the Ikhshidid ruler of Egypt, Kāfūr. Toward the end of 963, on the heels of a troubled reception in Baghdad that followed al-Mutanabbī's escape from the court of Kāfūr, the poet received an invitation to Arrajān in the southwestern part of the Iranian plateau from the Būyid vizier, Abū 'l Faḍl Muḥammad ibn al-'Amīd (d. 359/970). This marked the beginning of the poet's "Persian" period. From February 965 until his death in August of the same year, al-Mutanabbī composed a total of 13 poems (ten full-length odes and three shorter occasional pieces) in honor of first Ibn al-'Amīd and later his pupil, the Būyid prince 'Aḍud al-Dawla (d. 372/983), son of Rukn al-Dawla, one of the founders of the dynasty. Al-Mutanabbī's relationship with these Būyid patrons brought him face-to-face with a new political and cultural reality that necessarily challenged the worldview generally reflected in his poetry. The issue we will be considering here is whether and how cultural and ethnic difference affected al-Mutanabbī's poems for his Būyid patrons and what the implications for the evolution of elite Arabic poetry were.

In the Arabic panegyric, Arab imperial might, Arab ethnic values, and Arabic poetic mastery had traditionally been tied together. Well into the third/ninth century, long after the inception of the 'Abbāsid caliphate largely through the agency of the Khurasānīs and Persianized Arabs, the Arabic panegyric continued to cast the imperial ideal as being not just Muslim, but specifically Arab. No longer the golden age of caliphal absolutism, the world into which Abū 'l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (915–65 CE) was born witnessed the loss of 'Abbāsid authority over its vast lands and the disintegration of a once-unified empire. In this atmosphere of waning 'Abbāsid hegemony and the devolution of the empire into a collection of independent principalities,¹ al-Mutanabbī continued to champion a disappearing ideal of Arab glory and ethnic chauvinism. In

¹ Kennedy, "The 'Abbasid Caliphate," 7–10.

the poems he composed in honor of Sayf al-Dawla, the prince of the Aleppan branch of the Ḥamdānid dynasty, for example, al-Mutanabbī equated the glory of political dominance and military might with Arab identity and even with Arabic poetic prowess, thus enacting a pivotal identification between the poet and the political figure who was the object of his praise. Not only was the glory of the Islamic empire thematized, but Islamic triumphalism was conflated with Arab ethnic chauvinism. Al-Mutanabbī's racial pride was and is legendary, and in an era when the vast majority of Muslims were non-Arab, al-Mutanabbī persisted in articulating a poetics of empire in which communal glory was defined by the triumph of a heroic code intimately tied to Arab cultural identity. What happened then to his poetry when his paying patrons were no longer ethnic Arabs, and political dominance, as a basis for panegyric, had perforce to be separated from ethnic identity? While most al-Mutanabbī's poems to his Büyid patrons remained squarely within the realm of the conventional in Arabic panegyric, in one poem, which we will examine here, the ethnic differences between poet and patron constitute the generative mechanism of poetic innovation that had profound implications for the development of Arabic poetry.

The Büyids were a dynasty of Daylamite soldiers who were able to take advantage of the weakened state of the 'Abbāsid caliphate centered in Baghdad to establish independent control over central and southern Iran, and eventually much of Mesopotamia, during the tenth century. Persian culture dominated the Iranian plateau during this period. Even the now-enfeebled 'Abbāsids, who were largely indebted to Iranians not only for their rise to power but also the continued functioning of their administration, took on many of the aspects of Sasanian ceremonial aimed at aggrandizing the ruler and separating him from all but the closest members of his entourage.² Like their rivals, the Ziyārids and the Samānids, who adopted the customs and appurtenances of Sasanian kingship, the Büyids fashioned themselves and their reign as a reappearance of the lost Iranian monarchy. In 962 a silver coin commissioned by Rukn al-Dawla, one of the founding brothers of the dynasty, bore the inscription in Pahlavi: "May the glory of the King of Kings increase," and pictured him wearing a crown after the fashion of the Persian kings. Over the course of their years in power, the Büyids' pretensions to kingship increased, reaching their peak during the reign of Rukn al-Dawla's son, 'Aḍud al-Dawla, the most outstanding of the Büyid overlords, and the second of the two Büyid patrons for whom al-Mutanabbī composed panegyrics. In 969 'Aḍud al-Dawla had a gold

² Bosworth, "Heritage," 9–10. Indeed Bosworth points out that this fashion for things Persian can be traced to Umayyad caliphs such as 'Abd al-Malik and Hishām (*ibid.*, 9).

coin struck similar to the one his father had commissioned, which pictured his bust in the fashion of the Sasanian kings and contained inscriptions in Pahlavi, including, “long live Shāh Panākhosrow.”³ Contrary to custom, the name of the caliph was not mentioned. The use of his Persian name, Fanākhusraw, as well as the Middle Persian language and Sasanian-style portraiture, all point to the kingly ambition and Sasanianizing project of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla, even if that project was, as Richter-Bernburg suggests, intended primarily for the consumption of his Daylamite and Gilite subjects who were not familiar with Arabic.⁴ In 977 ‘Aḍud al-Dawla inserted details into his investiture ceremony intended to downplay his subservience to the caliph, before whom he was obliged to prostrate himself, and by 980 he had officially assumed the title of *shāhānshāh*, “King of Kings,” hearkening back to the glory days of the Sasanians.⁵ By 980 when Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Şābi’ (d. 387/997) completed the commemorative book ordered by ‘Aḍud al-Dawla, *Kitāb al-Tājī fi akhbār al-dawla al-daylamiyya*, that work presented an explicit genealogy that traced the amir’s origins to the Sasanian emperor, Bahrām Gūr (r. 420–38). Indeed this work even contained a fabricated genealogy tracing the Būyids back to the Arab tribe of Banū Ḫabba.⁶ Many of these explicit measures aimed at fostering the ancient Iranian connections of the Būyids had, of course, not yet taken place in 965 when al-Mutanabbī went to Shiraz to panegyrize ‘Aḍud al-Dawla. Nonetheless, notions of Iranian prestige, power, and aspirations dominated the century and necessarily played an important part in shaping the poetics of the scene.

Despite their pretensions to Persian kingship, which they shared with other groups in the tenth century, the Daylamites were originally known as a rough and ready group of infantrymen who served as mercenaries in the armies of the ‘Abbāsid caliphs and their predecessors before their own expansion into a major dynasty. They hailed from the highlands to the southwest of the Caspian Sea and probably spoke a “northwestern Iranian dialect very similar to the language of the Gilites.”⁷ Indeed the first generation of Būyid conquerors did not speak Arabic. Although they shared major aspects of the Persian culture that dominated the region, their distinct “pre-Iranian,”⁸ ethnic origins, about which virtually nothing is known, meant that they also possessed a unique culture and identity that persisted into the period of Būyid ascendancy. Even

³ Richter-Bernburg, “Amīr–Malik–Shāhānshāh,” 90.

⁴ Ibid. See also, Madelung, “Assumption,” 100; Miles, “Portrait,” 283; Busse, “Iran under the Būyids,” 273–5.

⁵ Busse, “Iran under the Būyids,” 275–7.

⁶ Bosworth, “Heritage,” 13.

⁷ Madelung, “Daylamites.”

⁸ Minorsky, “Daylam,” *EI*².

if we accept Bosworth's claim that "by the ninth century, a symbiosis of the two cultural traditions, the Arab-Muslim and the Persian ones, had been largely achieved,"⁹ which may in any case be somewhat exaggerated, it would be simplistic to assume that distinctive ethnic group identities, such as the Daylamites', were no longer meaningful in tenth-century Iran. Then too, given al-Mutanabbi's persistent emphasis on race throughout his poetry, ethnicity and identity would inevitably play an important role in his "Būyid corpus."

The term "ethnicity" can be somewhat problematic, especially when applied to a pre-modern group that cannot be identified with a delimited nation-state. In the case of the Būyids, the situation is particularly complex. On the one hand, the Būyids would seem at first to conform to the definition of an ethnic community or '*ethnie*' articulated by Hutchinson and Smith: "a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members."¹⁰ In regard to the Būyids, however, it is extremely important to keep in mind what Hutchinson and Smith themselves call the "kaleidoscopic and seemingly paradoxical... set of phenomena"¹¹ that combine to constitute this ethnic identity. This is a dynasty that was Daylamite in its ethnic origins, that bore some affinity to, but was not synonymous with, Persian culture, that aspired to ancient Sasanian kingly identity, while functioning in Arabic high culture, which was the court culture of the Muslim leadership, with its historical claims to Arab imperial exceptionalism, on the one hand, and Bedouin Arab customs, on the other. This complex matrix of ethnic and cultural origins and aspirations is what the patrons and various members of al-Mutanabbi's audience brought to the reception of his poetry. The dynamics of ethnic competition and competing claims thus necessarily came into play in the poetry that al-Mutanabbi produced for Ibn al-'Amīd and 'Aḍud al-Dawla.

If not all of the later-generations Būyid princes and administrators shared the Daylamite ethnic origins of the founders of the dynasty, they nonetheless shared Persianate, and sometimes Arab, cultural identity. Although the clear emphasis was on the Persian, it was not unusual for Būyid rulers to claim both Arab and Persian lineage.¹² As rulers, the Būyids participated in the high culture of the time, which was of course Arabic, and benefited from the prestige it granted them. The poetry functioned for them as it had for all preceding rulers, by giving public proclamation and recognition of their power and influence.

⁹ Bosworth, "Heritage," 11.

¹⁰ Hutchinson and Smith, *Ethnicity*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹² Bosworth, "Heritage," 14.

While the two Büyid patrons that al-Mutanabbī composed for were both highly literate men who were well versed in Arabic literary culture, to which they even contributed with their own poetry and prose compositions, they did not share the ethnic identity that was at the heart of the origins of the Arabic canon. It is true that we have very little information about the ethnic identities of either of al-Mutanabbi's two Büyid patrons, both educated Arabized Persians, and even less about their own cultural self-identifications. Clearly they both identified with Muslim imperial power and with elite Arab culture and scholarship. Still, as leading Büyids they undoubtedly shared the well-established Büyid dedication to the narrative of dynastic connection to Persian lineage. Accordingly, "moulded by the cultured indigenous aristocracy of Iran,"¹³ all the while that they were patronizing Arabic letters, they also showed an interest in New Persian literature, though of course not to the extent of the Sāmānids.

Of the two Büyids for whom al-Mutanabbī composed poetry, his first patron, the vizier Abū 'l-Faql ibn al-'Amīd (d. 359/970) was the more deeply rooted in Arabic letters and more distant from the Daylamite roots of the Büyid dynasty. An extraordinarily talented man who served as vizier to Rukn al-Dawla and tutor to his son 'Aḍud al-Dawla, Ibn al-'Amīd distinguished himself not only as an astute administrator, but also as a skilled warrior on the field of battle. More important from al-Mutanabbi's point of view, Ibn al-'Amīd was one of the most outstanding among a group of cultured Büyid viziers who assiduously encouraged scholarship and the arts and whose courts became important centers of intellectual exchange and learning. His reputation as a generous and indulgent patron of poets must have enticed al-Mutanabbī, despite or perhaps in addition to the vizier's well-known envy of him, which had led him to avoid talking about the poet or listening to his poetry. According to one anecdote, a friend paying a visit to Ibn al-'Amīd found the vizier depressed. Assuming the recent death of his sister to be the cause, the visitor was surprised to hear him say:

This Mutanabbī matter and my effort to suppress mention of him is vexing me: I've received some sixty letters of condolence and every one begins with [two verses from al-Mutanabbi's elegy on Sayf al-Dawla's sister]. How can I possibly stifle his reputation?¹⁴

If his devoted librarian, Miskawayh, is to be believed, Ibn al-'Amīd was a master of Arabic grammar, epistle-writing, exegesis, logic, philosophy, and

¹³ Cahen, "Buwayhids or Büyids," *EI*².

¹⁴ Al-Badī'i, *al-Šubḥ al-munabbī*, 146–7.

mathematics, among other fields. He possessed a prodigious memory and was thoroughly versed in pre-Islamic and classical Arabic poetry.¹⁵

During his three months in Arrajān, al-Mutanabbī composed five poems – three *qaṣīdas* and two shorter pieces – for Abū 'l Faḍl Muḥammad ibn al-'Amīd. Given Ibn al-'Amīd's origins and his deep learning, it is not surprising that the poems al-Mutanabbī composed for him flatter his Persian associations and his erudition. In the first *qaṣīda* to this patron (*Bādin hawāka*/“Your love is apparent”), al-Mutanabbī assures him that he deliberately chose to join his court and compose for him – an assurance that may not have been mere convention, given the history of the two men's relationship, on the one hand, and al-Mutanabbi's well-known preferences in patrons: “Time gave, but I did not accept its gift / It had intentions for me, but I wanted to choose.”¹⁶ Most relevant here, the poet praises Ibn al-'Amīd for encompassing in his personality and breadth of culture all the dominant civilizations of the Near East, thereby presumably transcending any perceived cultural differences:

Who will inform the desert Arabs that after them I
have seen Aristotle and Alexander?
I tired of slaughtering she-camels, then I enjoyed the hospitality
Of one who sacrifices bags of gold for those he hosts
And I heard Ptolemy study his books,
At once king, Bedouin, and city-dweller,
And I met [in him] all the men of learning, as if
God had restored their souls and their eras.¹⁷

The second *qaṣīda*, delivered on Nawrūz, understandably celebrates this Persian feast, the grand celebrations sponsored on that day, and the greatness of the patron behind them, who is described as a greater king even than the Sasanian Khusraw and his offspring. In a verse that speaks directly to the blended culture of this Büyid vizier, al-Mutanabbī describes Ibn al-'Amīd as follows: “His tongue is Arabic, his judgment philosophical / [But] his feasts are Persian.”¹⁸ In an uncharacteristic show of humility, be it feigned or sincere, in lines 20–5, al-Mutanabbī apologizes for a poem of his that was critiqued by Ibn al-'Amīd, thereby acknowledging his status as litterateur and judge even of al-Mutanabbi's work. Then in a typical Mutanabbiān combination of

¹⁵ Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, 2:224–7.

¹⁶ Al-Wāḥidī, *Dīwān*, 734.

¹⁷ Ibid., 738–9.

¹⁸ Ibid., 741–50.

boast and self-deprecation, he declares in verse 28: “My knowledge has encompassed all things, except for a noble man / whose eloquence I do not possess and whose strength I lack.”¹⁹ Lest there be any doubt that ethnicity was uppermost in al-Mutanabbi’s mind as he addressed his Persian patron, he declares in verse 32: “God has created the most eloquent of all people / in a place whose Arabs are Kurds.”²⁰ The last of al-Mutanabbi’s lengthy odes to Ibn al-‘Amīd is a 42-verse *qaṣīda* in which he bids him farewell before leaving for the court of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla in Shiraz. Predictably, there is no focus on cultural disparities in this poem, but rather only on shared values, affection, and respect, along with the customary cajoling of the patron to reward the poet liberally.²¹

In the major odes of this period, the theme of cultural identity is clearly thematized. With a subtle twist of irony that is characteristic of al-Mutanabbi’s style, the Persian identity of the patron is often used as the basis of an apparently eulogistic hyperbole, as Ibn al-‘Amīd is praised for being more Arab (in his eloquence) than the Arabs. Alternatively, his learning is so aggrandized as to transcend cultural identity altogether. In both, the sting of a Persian outdoing an Arab in erudition is dulled. Other than this, these compositions stray little from the conventional expectations for panegyric. The ethnic subtext does not result in any fundamental change in the poetry; it does not become the catalyst for innovation in classical Arabic praise poetry. In contrast, one poem from among the eight poems (seven odes and one short piece) that al-Mutanabbi composed at the court of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla stands out for its lyrical elaboration of the identity issues underlying this poet-patron relationship and for the innovation they engender.

Al-Mutanabbi arrived in Shiraz in 354/965, the guest of the Büyid prince ‘Aḍud al-Dawla, Ibn al-‘Amīd’s former pupil. The first section of the second *qaṣīda* composed for this patron takes as its focal point the natural beauty of the well-known valley of Bawwān outside the city of Shiraz, through which the poet had had to pass on his way to the court of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla.²² The first

¹⁹ Al-Wāḥidi, *Dīwān*, 747.

²⁰ Ibid., 748.

²¹ Ibid., 750–8.

²² Al-Wāḥidi describes the Valley of Bawwān as one of the garden paradises of the world, like the Ghūṭa of Damascus (al-Wāḥidi, *Dīwān*, 766), “the area of gardens and orchards which surrounds the former Umayyad capital” (Eliséeff, “Ghūṭa,” *EI*²). Blachère suggests that the description of this valley may have been a favorite theme to ‘Aḍud al-Dawla (Blachère, *Un poète arabe*, 244). It would, in any case, accord with the well-known taste in Persian poetry for descriptions of nature.

20 lines of the poem, translated below,²³ are an extended lyric prelude that precedes the more traditional panegyric to 'Adud al-Dawla. The 28 verses of the *madiḥ* section that follows offer standard eulogistic fare; indeed, most of them are so formulaic that they could be applied to any patron, Büyid or other. The lyricism of this first movement of the *qaṣīda*, unusual as it is in classical Arabic poetry, is all the more striking because it is directly generated by issues of cultural identity and ethnic difference. The genesis of this lyricism and its relation to the rest of the poem provide a revealing case study of how innovation can emerge from within a convention-bound poetic culture.

Because of their pleasantness, the abodes of the valley
 are to dwelling places as spring is to the times of the year
 But an Arab man there is
 a stranger in face, hand, and tongue
 Playgrounds to jinn, if Solomon roamed there
 he would take along an interpreter
 They so beckoned our riders and their horses that
 I feared, despite their nobility, that they would balk
 We went forth in the morning, with the branches shaking
 silver beads like pearls on their manes
 I proceeded, as the branches shielded me from the sun
 and allowed in [just] enough light for me
 The light entering through the chinks between the branches cast dinars
 on my clothing that eluded my fingertips
 They have fruit which they proffer to you
 like wine poised there without any receptacle
 and streams that make their pebbles clink
 like jewelry on the hands of singing girls
 If this were Damascus, my reins would be diverted
 by someone skilled at making *tharid* stew, with kettles white as china
 (from the meat of camel hump)
 Aloes wood would be used to kindle the fire
 for the guest, ambergris its smoke
 You dwell with him with a bold heart
 and depart from him with a timorous one
 [They are] abodes of which a specter remains

²³ This is a revised version of the translation, with an additional two verses, that appeared in Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbi*, 88–9. Discussion of the opening section of the poem, a few sentences of which are repeated here by permission of the publisher, appear on pages 89–93.

accompanying me to Nawbandajān
 When the ash colored pigeons sing there
 the songs of the singing girls answer them back
 And those in the valley are more in need
 of clarification than the pigeons when they sing and coo
 The two descriptions might seem similar,
 but the two things being described are far apart
 In the Valley of Bawwān my horse says:
 Would anyone leave this for the thrusting of spears in battle?
 Your father Adam set the model for sinning
 and taught you about leaving gardens
 I say: When I see Abū Shujā'
 I forget about all mankind and about that place
 For people and the world are [but] a road
 to the one who has no equal among men.²⁴

From the outset of this opening movement of the poem, a clear comparison between Arab and Persian culture is signaled. The very first verse contains an analogy that suggests a rational cognitive attempt to establish the merits of the valley of Bawwān vis-à-vis other abodes. The mention here of the catchword “abodes,” from the traditional *nasīb* of the polythematic *qaṣīda*, in connection with the valley of Bawwān, necessarily invites a comparison between the two environments, the traditional Arab abode or abandoned campsite of the *wuqūf ‘alā al-aṭlāl* in pre-Islamic and classical Arabic poetry, and the Persian abode of the valley outside the city of Shiraz. Here al-Mutanabbī is holding up the desert tribal existence familiar to all from the Arabic poetic tradition for comparison with the “spring-like” environment of the lush Persian landscape. The second line would seem explicitly to reference the situation of al-Mutanabbī, who is a stranger in this Persian setting, so that even though there is no use of the first person singular or plural at this point in the poem, a sense of the personal voice of the poetic persona clearly comes across. The phrase, “an Arab man” (*al-fatā al-‘arabī*) is noteworthy in this connection, for it serves two very important functions. On the one hand, it connects the imagined persona of the poem with the poet himself, whose poetry and beliefs were well known, and whose present circumstances were appreciated. Given the audience’s, and indeed our, knowledge of the relationship between the circumstances of the poem and the subjectivity conveyed in the piece, a certain conflation of the terms “poetic persona” and “poet” is rather inevitable here. Furthermore,

²⁴ Al-Wahidī, *Dīwān*, 766–9.

because the phrase can also be read as impersonal, it renders the dilemma faced by the poetic persona one of general applicability. In other words, the feelings and reactions described are not the mere idiosyncratic reactions of a particular Arab, but rather the natural response any Arab would have in this situation. This movement of the poem thus speaks directly to the issue of cultural identity and the reconciliation of otherness in the face of a Persian physical presence. It is clear that there is far more at work in this lyrical exordium than the “nostalgia” that Blachère sees in this piece.²⁵ Al-Mutanabbī was, by this point in his career, very well known, his poetry widely studied and emulated. The audience for this poetry thus, in a very real sense, went beyond ‘Aḍud al-Dawla and his circle, for al-Mutanabbī was also composing consciously for his Arab audience, and indeed, also consciously, for posterity. When he speaks of “an Arab man,” he is therefore generalizing to include this Arab community that constituted part of his audience. He is thus situating the reader/listener and establishing the terms of his reception of the poetry and his understanding of the performance event itself, making the recitation of this poem a performance of competing identities.

With the phrase “a stranger in face, hand, and tongue,” the sense of a virtually invisible speaker is created. In the emphasis in lines 2 and 3 on the strangeness of the indigenous language to the poetic persona, the idea is indirectly suggested that the language of the poet is also inherently strange to his Büyid audience. Indeed the strangeness of the indigenous language is exaggerated by reference to the prophet Solomon, knower even of the languages of the birds (Q 27.16–17), who is as in need of translation as the poetic persona. Incomprehensibility is thus not described as a product of the poet’s ignorance of the Persian vernacular, but rather of the inherent otherness of its speakers. This hyperbolic description of the strangeness of the patron’s vernacular might well have been construable as uncomplimentary to his patrons and fellow Muslims and might have set the wrong tone for what is ultimately to be a praise poem, were it not for the fact that the overall tone of the piece suggests that the dilemma is the poet’s, not his patron’s.

As if to mitigate the potential insult and to render his own feelings more complex, the poet immediately launches into a scene in which he is seduced by the physical beauty of the valley as he passes through it. The poetic persona, cast as a bewildered, faceless, and voiceless stranger in the preceding verses, is now shown to be drawn by the natural beauty of the unknown environment. Indeed, in a very real sense, it is as if nature, the features of which are represented as being protective of the newcomer, is attempting to constitute him.

25 Blachère, *Un poète arabe*, 244.

The scene is a dynamic one as the poetic persona gradually ventures into the unknown terrain, dependent on nature for the sense of security his strangeness has deprived him of. The sensual description of the scene nonetheless conveys the tension of the poet's psychological state, for while nature provides light, it is just enough for the poet's passage. The sense of insecurity in the face of the unknown is retained, while being implicitly assuaged by the suggestion of promised reward in the dinars of light on the poet's clothing and the invitation to good times and self-indulgence suggested by the succulent fruit on the tree branches. All the senses are engaged, sight, touch, taste, and sound, but each is constrained or ineffectual in some way. Vision facilitated by the meager light breaking through the branches is limited; touch cannot grasp the imagined dinars; the wine evoked by the succulent fruit is imaginary and beyond reach. The treatment of nature here differs greatly from what is customary in Arabic poetry up to the 'Abbāsid era,²⁶ and can, without facile exaggeration, be called romantic. This is a poetically compelling and sensuous enactment of the process of constructing and negotiating identity as described by Stuart Hall. Following Derrida, Laclau, and Butler, Hall states,

identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive* outside that the "positive" meaning of any term – and thus its "identity" – can be constructed.²⁷

Here, the Arab poetic persona, presented as isolated and out of sync with his surroundings, is coaxed into belonging by the physical features of the quintessentially Persian natural environment. The tension at the heart of this process is signaled by the abrupt comparison with Damascus in the following verse. If the individual stranger in a strange land is seeking a sense of secure identity, it is summoned up in the communal Arab identity associated with Damascus and its traditional Arab customs.

With the following verses, the source of the poetic persona's anxiety as a crisis of identity is spelled out in a more explicitly discursive manner, as he summons a scene, replete with familiar topoi relating to Arab *muriwwa*, that brings the comparison between Arab and Persian customs and topography sharply into relief. The scene conjured up is one of Arab hospitality in Damascus, the natural beauty of which would be recognized as a worthy rival

²⁶ See Schoeler, *Arabische Naturdichtung*.

²⁷ Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?", 4–5.

to the valley of Bawwān. Were this Damascus, the poet would be stopped by an Arab eager to shower him with unstinting hospitality. The reference to kettles that are white as china derives from a well-known *jāhilī* metaphor for a generous man, in whose kettles can be seen the white hump of the camel cooking in the stew, for the owner does not just feed his guests a weak stew, but rather slaughters a camel to enrich it with meat. Likewise, the fire he lights is redolent with the fragrance of sumptuous aloes wood and ambergris. The lavishness of this reception is exaggerated by the use of a word of Persian origin, *yalanjūjī*, which would delight his Persianate audience while also warding off any temptation they might feel toward *shu‘ubī* scorn of Bedouin customs. The scene the poet describes is a quintessentially Arab one, with pre-Islamic Bedouin overtones – in other words, precisely the milieu that might elsewhere be stereotyped as coarse or primitive. Al-Mutanabbī here stamps the evocation of Arab cultural values and customs with luxurious scents and Persian grandness, thus implicitly challenging the presumed Persian monopoly on splendor and setting up Arab heritage as a worthy competitor.

With this scene, replete with tropes that resonate from the Bedouin Arab origins of Arabic poetry, the contrast between the familiar Arab cultural environment and the unknown, if appealing, Persian environment is brought into stark relief. It is interesting that there is little sense of agency on the part of the speaker at this point in the poem. The scene is presented as ethnographic reporting, which serves to bolster the sense that there is a real cognitive assessment going on in the speaker, and presumably his audience, in which two sets of customs and environments are being compared. It is not until the following verse that there is an explicit expression by the first-person speaker of belonging to the newly evoked Arab cultural paradigm: “[They are] abodes of which a specter remains / accompanying me to Nawbandajān”. With this the speaker’s conflict is still not yet fully resolved, for in this explicit statement, cultural identity is nothing but a “specter,” a memory. His conflicted state of mind is further conveyed in the following verse where the singing of the pigeons in the valley, taking place in the “present” of the poem, competes with the contrasting sound of singing girls, emanating from the Damascus of the poet’s imagination and memory. The two environments, Persia and Damascus, are thus set in clear competition. The ambiguity of the pronominal suffix in the word *fīhā* in verse 14, which could refer, as al-Ma’arrī points out,²⁸ either to the abodes of Damascus just conjured up, or the *Maghānī al-shi‘bi*, “the abodes of the valley,” of the first line of the poem, brings the comparison between the two places to a point.

²⁸ Al-Ma’arrī, *Sharḥ*, 4:341.

The equivocal emotional state of the poet is further suggested in the next line, where the poet uses two words to refer to the sound of the pigeons, one associated with happiness, the other with grief and sadness, and while the line explicitly returns to the idea of the incomprehensibility of the people of the valley, it can also be read as referring to the poet himself. The poet spells out the contrast and conflict in the next verse, “The two descriptions might seem similar / but the two things being described are far apart.” With this he also subtly impugns the efficacy of speech and description, suggesting that the true meaning of a person or entity is not necessarily captured in its verbal description. This denial of a binding correlation between language and essential truth implies a limitation to the power of language to establish identity. To the highly literate Büyids capable of fluent speaking and eloquent composition in the Arabic language, this serves as a reminder of the inherent differences between Arabs and the Arabized, between poet and patron, that cannot be transcended by language proficiency. For the individual poet, this statement sets the terms for a less intimate relationship than he famously enjoyed with Sayf al-Dawla, ruler of the Aleppan branch of the rival Ḥamdanid dynasty. The implications for the praise poetry he is engaged in are inescapable. With the speech of a personified horse, the poet’s familiar alter ego, in the next two verses, departure from the liminal space of the valley through which the poet is passing is cast in doctrinal terms, as the choice not to abide in the garden is likened to original sin and Adam’s loss of Paradise. With the following two-verse *takhalluṣ* making the transition to the *madiḥ* proper of the poem, the patron is ostensibly paid the ultimate compliment, as he is presented as the great clarifier, the dispeller of all conflict, the goal that obviates consideration of all else, including beautiful gardens. With typically double-edged hyperbole, al-Mutanabbī suggests that the patron is so compelling as to cause one to disregard the loss of Paradise and, presumably, the sin that causes it.

By emphasizing here the unusual lyricism of this piece, we have not meant to suggest that classical Arabic poetry is generally devoid of lyricism. Régis Blachère in his seminal work on al-Mutanabbī noted the lyricism of many of the poet’s amatory preludes. By the ‘Abbāsid era, and especially at the hands of al-Mutanabbī, the *nasib* and its traditional territory had become the site for real experimentation. The amatory verse that had traditionally occupied this opening slot became less and less common, leaving the space of the traditional *nasib* to diverse types of discourse, from philosophizing to personal complaint, to any of the traditional *aghraq* of the *qaṣida*. Experimentation, and individual creativity, though not limited to the exordium, certainly found their most welcome abode there. Indeed, scholars of Arabic poetry, relying on Aristotle’s tripartite division, have consistently referred to pre-modern Arabic

poetry, with the exception of some of the patently epic accounts of battle and other historical events, as lyric.²⁹ Given how little Aristotle actually said about lyric, we must wonder how useful a gauge this is and whether it might not be more fruitful to consider our poem from the perspective of modern critical perspectives on lyric.

There is no doubt that this piece conforms to some of the still-dominant, post-Romantic expectations of lyric as the “overheard” voice of a poetic self. Clearly the piece under discussion involves the construction of subjectivity in the present. There is personal expression by a lyric “I,” and there is introspection, emotion, and musicality. In the last few decades, however, scholars such as Mark Jeffreys and Scott Brewster,³⁰ to name but two, have attempted to loosen New Criticism’s stronghold over our communal understanding of lyric and have argued against the hegemony of the post-Romantic notion of lyric with its emphasis on intense subjective experience. In particular, they have highlighted the diverse forms that lyric has taken over time and demonstrated that at various points in history lyric has focused on performance, dramatic monologue, and even oratory and persuasion.³¹ In this attempt to uncover the diversity of lyric, modern critical studies of lyric as a genre would benefit from the inclusion of Arabic poetry in their sample set, for poems such as the one under discussion complicate simplistic notions of the limits of lyric. It is not our primary goal to participate in the attempt to define and delimit lyric in generic terms, but rather to signal the richness of the lyricism occasioned by cultural difference in the convention-dominated environment of classical Arabic poetry, and to highlight its power to generate innovation and reframe the use of longstanding poetic conventions. The facile distinction between poetry (i.e., lyric) and eloquence offered by John Stuart Mill in his 1833 essay, “What is Poetry?,” will serve as a useful foil to help elucidate the multivalent nature of the lyric at hand and its implications for classical Arabic poetics:

Poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or utterance of feeling; but... we should say that eloquence is *heard*; poetry is *overheard*. Eloquence supposes an audience. The peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude... Poetry, accordingly,

²⁹ See, for example, van Gelder, “The Abstracted Self,” and Stetkevych, “Arabic Lyrical Phenomenon.”

³⁰ See, for example, Jeffreys, “Ideologies of Lyric,” and Brewster, *Lyric*.

³¹ Brewster, *Lyric*, 15–42.

is the natural fruit of solitude and meditation; eloquence, of intercourse with the world.³²

The lyrical opening of our *qaṣīda*, contrary to Mill's definition, clearly contains not only narrative and dramatic monologue, but especially a clear "intercourse with the world." Indeed, it is precisely through this intercourse with the world, with its diverse political and cultural affiliations, that the lyric is constituted. To put the matter in Bakhtinian terms, the poetic persona/poet is forced into a dialogic cultural encounter, which is here embodied by the natural environment. Despite al-Mutanabbi's personal proclivities and the presumed monologism of Arabic poetic culture, what Bakhtin says of language in "Discourse in the Novel" is specifically relevant to this poetry:³³

[L]anguage is heteroglot from top to bottom; it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present . . . and so forth, all given a bodily form.³⁴

The broad significance of al-Mutanabbi's lyricism in this piece is perhaps best understood if we view it from the perspective of performance, for Arabic poetry in the tenth century was still very much a performance, not just in the sense of a theatrical performance,³⁵ but especially in the sense of an enactment of cultural identity. The formal recitation of Arabic poetry was necessarily a performance that was both ritual and performative. Like every other oral performance of poetry before powerful and learned aficionados, al-Mutanabbi's poetry was inherently commemorative. It commemorated Bedouin Arab history and re-inscribed Arab cultural values. We have seen how communal values and shared history were imbricated directly in the conventions of the poetry themselves. In a conservative poetic culture where conventions associated with desert life were still demanded, recitation became a

³² Mill, "What is Poetry?", 76–83.

³³ I am not alone in rejecting Bakhtin's notion that dialogism is exclusive to "prose art," a notion which Bakhtin himself deviated from at times. In the case at hand, it is poetry that is "still warm from [the] struggle" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic*, 331) of cross-cultural encounter.

³⁴ Ibid., 291.

³⁵ Meisami states in connection with the idea of performance: "The Arabic or Persian poem is no less a performance than the oration or the drama . . . and the poet's role, as he confronts patron and audience, seems no less dramatic than that of orator or actor." (Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, 142.) Gruendler seeks to find "traces of performance in [the *madīh*'s] text that reflect its function" (Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry*, 27).

celebration and re-enactment of communal history and shared ethnic and cultural heritage. Because of the role poetry played in Arab-Islamic society and its association with a tribal desert past, as well as its connection with the exalted language and social origins of the Qur'an, recitation of poetry was necessarily an act of collective remembering. Poetic conventions in this context amounted to an encoding of collective memory, real or invented.

At the same time, the poetry was performative, for it did not just *speak* history but also *made* history by its very iteration. It was not just a celebration, but also an enactment, for "[p]erformance is not merely a way to express something, but is itself an aspect of that which it is expressing."³⁶ In the tradition of the caliphs and other holders of power, the Büyids were able to establish a rich court that employed well-known poets to provide artistic and persuasive propaganda.³⁷ This enterprise was evidence of the patron's wealth and power, and this poetics of empire necessarily inscribed the Büyids into the long line of Muslim dynastic leaders. With the compositions of al-Mutanabbī, the Büyids were in a very real sense now writing Islamic imperial history and also Arabic cultural history. It is easy to understand what a patron such as 'Aḍud al-Dawla would gain from such a performance, for if he could not fully share in Arab cultural history by virtue of ethnicity, he did nonetheless participate in it by virtue of a "lineage of belief"³⁸ and of power. If participation in the poetic performance traditionally served to enact membership of poet and audience in a particular cultural group, the opening movement of al-Mutanabbi's *Maghāni al-shī'bi*/"Because of their pleasantness, the abodes of the valley" serves to problematize that essential function of Arabic poetry, as the associations between history, cultural identity, ethnicity, power, and poetic convention are deconstructed for the poet and his audience to re-evaluate.

The question we must inevitably ask is: what is the effect of this unusual – in length, theme, and genre – opening lyric on the rest of the *qaṣīda* to 'Aḍud al-Dawla? How is the reception of the panegyric that follows conditioned by this lengthy, proto-Romantic exordium? The purpose of the *madīh* was to praise the patron and encourage his generosity. Traditionally, it exalted the liberality and political and military prowess of the patron, and praised his allegiance to Arab values of *muruwwa*. As Suzanne Stetkevych has demonstrated,

³⁶ Rappaport, *Ecology*, 177. Similarly, James Montgomery states, "[performance] is both representative and creative of what it expresses" (Montgomery, "Convention as Cognition," 173).

³⁷ See Stetkevych, *Islamic Legitimacy*, for a discussion of the social and political pact between poet and patron.

³⁸ Hervieu-Léger, *Chain of Memory*, 383.

pre-Islamic Arab customs and values continued to be promoted as key elements of the communal ethos during the ‘Abbāsid era and were assiduously woven into the major poems of the era.³⁹ The second, or praise, section of the poem under discussion consists mostly of lines of praise that could be applied to any patron. Even in the case of the several verses that play on the name of the Büyid prince, the gist of these lines could, by changing the name, easily be transferred to another. Indeed, many verses are strikingly similar to others presented in earlier poems in honor of Sayf al-Dawla. In short, this is a highly conventional panegyric. The poet declares that he has, until now, merely been honing his art on less worthy objects of praise (verse 21). There could be no one more worthy of his name than the patron (verse 25), and his attributes are too great to be appreciated by imagination, perception, or description (verse 26). Although he protects his populace, his gifts and valued possessions are not safe from his great generosity and tendency to disperse them (verse 32). There is a marked focus on ‘Adud al-Dawla as keeper of order and security in the realm, with only thin reference to military might. This is not surprising given the fact that the patron was only 29 years old at the time and could not yet claim the impressive accomplishments for which he would ultimately be remembered. His reputation as a poet and patron of the arts was already in place, but he had not yet become the renowned unifier of the Büyid empire who expanded its dominion and built numerous dams, libraries, marketplaces, and hospitals. Accordingly, ‘Adud al-Dawla is here lauded for providing protection from criminals and security for merchants and their stores (verses 28–30). He has so banished fear from his realm, the poem claims, that the terms of a familiar *topos* of *ghazal* (love poetry) have been nullified: “And if the hearts of lovers were flung into them (i.e., the lands under ‘Adud al-Dawla’s authority) / they would not fear beautiful pupils (i.e., the pupils of beautiful women)” (verse 36). Five verses praise the patron’s two sons and extol the training and experience they received in their father’s court (verses 37–41), and the poem ends with prayers for their and their father’s long life and success (verse 42–45).

The difference between the two sections of the poem could hardly be more pronounced. One could almost read them as two discrete poems, the first innovative, lyrical, subjective, the second conventional, stylized, and impersonal. The obvious transition, or *takhallus*, between the two sections is, as Arabic rhetoric dictated, a clear and identifiable seam. This was, after all, a polythematic *qaṣīda*, and there was therefore a certain expectation of diverse movements within the same ode. We must ask then, how, in the specific historical moment, would the audience react to such an orchestration of poetic move-

39 Stetkevych, “The ‘Abbasid Poet Interprets History.”

ments? How would the hackneyed fare of the *madiḥ* section of the poem be received by al-Mutanabbi's listeners after hearing his dazzlingly innovative opening piece? The larger question, of course, is how does innovation condition the reception of blatant convention within a single poem, not to mention an entire poetic corpus? The answers to these questions, it is hoped, will be a small contribution toward answering the larger one about how change comes about within a heavily conventionalized poetic canon.

These questions do assume that there is some kind of dialog between the parts of the poem. By examining the relationship between the opening section of the poem and praise section, we are not, I would insist, falling into the guilty abyss of seeking organicity in a poetic tradition that clearly did not demand, or perhaps even expect, it.⁴⁰ This assumption is particularly defensible in the case of the Bawwān poem because the various conventional divisions of the ode relate to different historical realities and function to bring into relief the underlying ethnic and cultural differences between poet and patron. As noted above, the opening of the poem is naturally associated with the *nasīb* and its Bedouin Arab heritage. The *madiḥ* more easily links up with the historical present and the transaction between poet and patron. If what van Gelder says about the *nasīb* holds true even for the transformed exordium of the 'Abbāsid *qaṣīda* – "[the *nasīb*] is the 'key of the poem'; it helps the poet in triggering off whatever follows"⁴¹ – then our poet's audience would necessarily be engaged in relating the two sections of the poem.⁴² The Arabized Persians among al-Mutanabbi's listeners, not to mention, of course, the Arabs at the Būyid court, possessed the same habits of literary art and were trained in the same conventions regarding the reception of poetry as their poet. There is much about the historical circumstances of the creation, performance, and reception of this poem that we are not able to know, but there is no doubt that al-Mutanabbi's audience of aficionados would have recognized the uniqueness of his opening lyric. How then would they have reacted to the rest of the poem?

Would the flatness of the *madiḥ*, in contrast to the lyrical prelude, impugn its sincerity and exaggerate the sense of distance between the poet and his patron? Perhaps, but conversely, 'Adud al-Dawla and his entourage may simply

⁴⁰ Regarding this question, see van Gelder, "Genres in Collision," 22, and especially his *Beyond the Line*.

⁴¹ Van Gelder, "Genres in Collision," 20.

⁴² Relevant here is Montgomery's contention that "the scrutiny of the structure of the *qaṣīda* and the experiments with its potentialities were an indigenous part of the Abbasid tradition, almost to the point of themselves becoming conventions" (Montgomery, "Convention and Invention," 37).

have been deeply flattered to have occasioned such spectacular innovation from the star poet. Imbued with love of the Persian countryside and pride in the illustrious Persian heritage, they may have taken it as a great compliment that the Persian environment and culture elicited such an exquisite expression of personal emotion. The protocol and the politics of the situation would surely have demanded this type of response. In that sense, of course, al-Mutanabbi may have so thoroughly sealed the deal with the lyric that nobody would really expect a similar tour de force in the *madīh*. But in a highly conventional poetic environment, could innovation ever be so insulated and nugatory? I think not.

On the contrary, I would like to suggest that what takes place here is a kind of defamiliarizing process, where the innovative opening section of the poem and the individual components of it serve to bring into relief the conventionality of what follows and allow the audience to perceive it afresh. To borrow the language of the Russian Formalist, Viktor Shklovskii, defamiliarization involves “estranging,” “slowing down,” “prolonging” perception, so as to block the recipient’s habitual response to the poetic form.⁴³ The conventional thus seems more conventional, the hackneyed all the more so. At the same time, and perhaps more important for this poem, the *idea* of conventionality becomes thematized: “the defeating or reorienting of our expectations about a text’s conformity to precedent becomes part of its meaning.”⁴⁴ This, we have implicitly argued above, was already the case in this particular poem because of the association of Arabic poetic conventions with Arab communal memory, weighed against the explicit cultural aspirations of the patron.

To appreciate the significance of this, it is helpful to recall David Lewis’ definition of convention in the 1975 edition of his seminal work, *Convention: A Philosophical Study*:

Conventions are regularities in action, or in action and belief, which are arbitrary but perpetuate themselves because they serve some common interest. Past conformity breeds future conformity because it gives one a reason to go on conforming; but there is some alternative regularity which could have served instead, and would have perpetuated itself in the same way if only it got started.⁴⁵

43 McCauley, “Russian Formalism,” 636.

44 Reeves, “‘Conveniency to Nature,’ ” 801.

45 Mailloux, *Interpretive Conventions*, 127–8.

If we think of convention formation as a kind of social pact,⁴⁶ the participation of Arabized Persians such as ‘Aḍud al-Dawla in judging a poetic form to be conventional amounts to participation in that social agreement and implies membership in the group that possesses the communal authority to determine conventions. It is as if a small gap is thus opened in the sealed-off wall of culturally settled conventionality to allow the historical Other, the Arabized Persian, to participate. The defamiliarization made possible by the innovation undermines the historicity of the convention and implicitly allows expansion of the group of those who can be arbiters of taste. In this way, al-Mutanabbi’s audience is able to enact a version of the communal selection of poetic forms, and at that point in the reception of the poem, could enjoy the ceremonial function of the *madīh*. Safe in the comfort zone of familiar convention that was not cognitively or emotionally challenging, ‘Aḍud al-Dawla was able to enjoy the panegyric as any Arab patron might have. In this context, convention suited him just fine.

There is little doubt that the Bawwān prelude to al-Mutanabbi’s *qaṣīda* in honor of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla represents a significant departure from ‘Abbāsid poetic custom. While not the first or only instance of lyricism in this corpus, it is unusual for its length, its focus on the construction of personal identity, and its engagement with nature in that process. Directly engendered by consciousness of ethnic and cultural difference, this innovative piece specifically reflects the changing historical conditions surrounding the patronage of elite Arabic poetry. It furthermore conditioned the reception of the highly conventional praise section that followed it. If, as we have concluded, this dialectic of innovation/convention – or, to borrow the Formalists’ terms again, “automatization/de-automatization” – suited the needs of al-Mutanabbi’s Būyid patron, the question remains as to how it might produce change in the canon over time. The Russian Formalists, and in particular, Tynjanov’s and Jakobson’s notion of the “dominant” as a feature of the diachronic literary system, are helpful here. As Peter Steiner puts it in speaking of the former:

To be meaningful, the perceptibility of a speech construction needed an opposite – the automatization of this perception. Literary change is triggered by the tension between these two. “Evolution is caused by the need for a ceaseless dynamics. Every dynamic system inevitably becomes automatized and an opposite constructive principle dialectically arises.”

46 For the record, Lewis specifically rejects the notion that convention is nothing but a social contract in the Hobbesian sense (Lewis, *Convention*, 88).

The life of a literary fact is the vacillation of a linguistic construction between these two poles.⁴⁷

What I am suggesting is that the alternation between the innovative lyric and the conventional panegyric in the Bawwān ode represented a moment of potential generic evolution. I and many others, including many modern Arab critics and poets,⁴⁸ have made much of the elaboration of individual voice in the poetry of al-Mutanabbī, and have seen in it a kind of proleptic modernism. Certainly the piece under discussion would fall into that category. But innovation and convention co-existed within individual poems and within the literary system as a whole. I have therefore tried to look not only at the lyricism in this poem and what engendered it, but also its effect on the more conventional elements occurring in the same poem. In order to understand how change could occur in the conventional system of ‘Abbāsid poetry, it is necessary for us to consider not only the innovation itself, but also how it changes the perception and reception of the conventions that co-exist with it, and indeed of conventionality itself. Why the innovative potential uncovered by al-Mutanabbī was not fully exploited by his immediate successors is a question we must leave for another time.

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⁴⁷ Steiner, *Russian Formalism*, 107.

⁴⁸ Alḥmad al-Zayyāt, for example, referred to al-Mutanabbī as “the leader of the romantic school in Arabic poetry” (*Tārīkh*, 227), and the modern Palestinian poet, Maḥmūd Darwīsh angered his fellow poets by suggesting that al-Mutanabbī was more modern than they (Linthicum, “Mahmoud Darwish Indicts,” 15).

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Must God Tell Us the Truth? A Problem in Ash‘arī Theology

*Khaled El-Rouayheb**

Oh threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise!
 One thing at least is certain – *This Life flies;*
 One thing is certain and the rest is lies;
 The Flower that once has blown forever dies.

E. FITZGERALD, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

In Plato's dialog *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks his interlocutor whether “the pious” is simply what the gods command or whether the gods instead command what is intrinsically pious.¹ The Christian and Islamic theological traditions would of course amend Plato's talk of “gods” in the plural, but the basic problem remained: do acts such as stealing, killing, and helping the needy have intrinsic moral qualities that explain why God commands or prohibits them? Or is it the other way around: acts have no intrinsic moral qualities prior to divine command and prohibition – thus stealing and killing are evil acts simply because God prohibits them, whereas helping the needy is good simply because God commands it?

In both the Christian and the Islamic traditions, theologians were divided about this issue. In the Christian tradition, Plato's own position that acts have intrinsic moral qualities seems to have been predominant, though the opposite view – sometimes referred to as “divine-command ethics” or “divine voluntarism” – did not lack prominent adherents (for example, Ockham, Calvin, and Kierkegaard). In the Islamic case, the position that acts have no moral qualities apart from divine command was particularly influential. It was the position of the Ash‘arī and (with some modifications) Māturīdī schools that prevailed in mainstream Sunni Islam throughout the medieval and early modern periods.² On this account, God is not bound by human prejudices concerning “good” and “bad.” He may do and command as He pleases and “is not

* I would like to thank Patricia Crone and Behnam Sadeghi for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. The responsibility for remaining shortcomings is of course mine alone.

¹ Plato, *Euthyphro*, 10D.

² See Frank, “Moral Obligation,” 204–23.

accountable for what He does" (*lā yus'alu 'ammā yaf'al*). Some later Ash'arīs were prepared to admit that unaided human reason might be able to discern that certain acts are conducive or disadvantageous to human flourishing in this world, but they insisted that God is not bound to do or command what is conducive to human flourishing.³ The fact that His actions and commands often are so conducive is something for which we should be grateful, for it might well have been otherwise.

From a theological perspective, one advantage of this view is that it dispenses neatly with the problem of evil. Examples of horrible human suffering by disease and natural disasters are simply decreed by God who is not bound to do what is best for His creatures. It is emphatically not the case that such suffering must somehow be conducive to some greater human good that we cannot perceive here and now. God could surely, Islamic "divine-command" theorists argued, have brought about such greater good without the suffering.

Historically, a number of objections have been raised against "divine-command ethics." In what follows, I explore one major difficulty that medieval Ash'arī theologians faced. If nothing has intrinsic moral value apart from divine fiat, and if God is free to do and command as He pleases without being answerable to human prejudices about good and evil, then what reason is there to think that He is bound to tell us the truth? For example, given that God tells us that He will grant us Paradise as a recompense for worshipping and obeying Him, is He bound to keep this promise? A closely related problem is this: what guarantee is there that God has not enabled imposters and liars to produce wondrous miracles in support of their claims of being divinely instituted spokesmen of God? Here it would seem that, for example, Mu'tazilī and later Shī'ī theologians, with their notion of objective moral qualities, have an advantage. They can, it seems, appeal to the intrinsic evil of lying or misleading others and rule out that such actions could be done by a God who is perfectly good. Things may not in fact be as easy as this, for they must arguably also rule out that God could be lying or misleading us *for some greater good of which we are not aware*. After all, they must concede that He sometimes allows horrible things to happen to innocent people for some ultimate good that we cannot discern. But I shall not pursue this point here. Regardless of whether the truthfulness of God is a problem for ethical objectivists, it seems clear that it does pose a serious problem for proponents of divine-command ethics. Appealing to scripture itself to rule out that God is lying or misleading seems blatantly circular, at least at first sight. But it is not at all clear how one can rule out the possibility on purely rational grounds without betraying the principle that

³ Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 529–30.

lying is not intrinsically evil and that God may do as He pleases without being accountable to human moral prejudices. A number of Ash'arī theologians addressed this problem, and it is to their discussions and proposed solutions that the present essay is devoted. An exhaustive survey of relevant discussions from the beginning of the theological tradition to the twentieth century would of course require a separate monograph. I shall here confine myself to the treatment of the issue by four prominent Ash'arī theologians: Imām al-Haramayn al-Juwainī (d. 478/1085), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), and Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233).

Juwainī

In his influential *al-Irshād ilā qawāṭī’ al-adilla min uṣūl al-i’tiqād*, al-Juwainī devoted a section to showing that God cannot possibly lie.⁴ He first presented the difficulty in the form of an anticipated objection to the view that miracles amount to an explicit assent by God to the claim of a person to be a prophet. The objection is that even if it were conceded that the miracle is brought about by God in support of the prophet's claim, one would still need to rule out the possibility that God is being deceitful. The objection continues that, on Ash'arī principles, it is difficult to see how one can rule out this possibility. Juwaynī wrote:

It might be said: Even if it were conceded that the miracle is equivalent to explicit assent [by God to the claim of the prophet], your objective is not fulfilled unless you also establish the impossibility of deceit and falsehood in the decree of God. There is no way of doing this by appealing to reports, for reports are based on the statements of God and as long as it is not established that He must be veracious and truthful no report can remain an axiom ... It is also not possible, in order to divest God of lying, to appeal to lying being an imperfection, for two reasons: One is that lying in your view is not repugnant in itself. Second, even if it were conceded that it is an imperfection, the negation of all imperfections [of God] is itself based on reports.⁵

⁴ Juwaynī, *Irshād*, 331–7. There is an excellent English translation of the work by Paul Walker; see al-Juwainī, *A Guide*. I have nevertheless made my own translations from the Arabic to ensure consistency in style and terminology with the translations that I will go on to make from other Ash'arī works.

⁵ Juwaynī, *Irshād*, 331 (1.12ff.).

Juwaynī's response to the objection proceeds in two stages. He first introduced the idea that God's creating a miracle at the hands of a person who claims to be a prophet is tantamount to anointing the person a prophet then and there. It is like someone saying "I hereby appoint you as my representative." Such a statement is not a simple assertion amenable to truth or falsity but rather an *inshā'*, i.e., an utterance whose primary objective is not to state how things are but to bring about a certain state of affairs. In other words, the miracle is equivalent to what the much later English philosopher John Austin (d. 1960) would call a "performative" speech act.⁶ Juwaynī wrote:

We say: As for prophecy, it can be established without recourse to this [i.e., showing that God is not deceitful] and does not depend on declarations that are subject to truth or falsity. This would be like the Sender of the prophet saying "I have made him a prophet" . . . the same way that someone might say "I have made you a representative (*wakīl*) in my affairs" for this is a valid act of appointing someone a representative regardless of truth or falsity.⁷

Juwaynī went on to observe that the preceding argument might establish how miracles support the claims of a person to be a prophet, but that they do not establish the veracity of that prophet. After all, it has not yet been established that God cannot deceive or lie, and therefore all that has been shown so far is that miracles confirm that someone is a prophet. What remains to be shown is that the pronouncements of this prophet are actually true. Juwaynī wrote:

Nevertheless, even after establishing prophecy [in this way], the truthfulness of the prophet in what he conveys and prohibits and legislates and explicates . . . is not established unless it is certain that God is free of deceit and falsehood.⁸

Juwaynī's argument for the impossibility of falsehood in God's Word can be summarized as follows: he takes it as established that God is all-knowing and he takes it as evident that someone who knows should in principle be able to express this knowledge truthfully. But if God's eternal and unchanging Word were false, then it would be impossible for God to express His Knowledge truthfully and this is absurd. Juwaynī wrote:

⁶ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, esp. Lecture I.

⁷ Juwaynī, *Irshād*, 332 (l.7ff.).

⁸ Ibid., 333 (l.3ff.).

We have made clear the ways leading to knowing that God the Exalted Knows and Wills, and we have mentioned what is convincing with respect to establishing the spiritual word (*al-kalām al-nafṣī*). Now for the one who knows something and wills it, it is not impossible that he should be described as stating what he knows and wills in accordance with how his knowledge and will relates to it [i.e., truly]... If God most High did not have the attribute of true speech, then he would have to have the opposite attribute... The opposite of true speech is speech that is deceitful and false that is not in accordance with the thing reported. As long as we hold this attribute [i.e., false speech] to be eternal, one must judge it to be impossible that it ceases to be, since [God's] Word is eternal as we have mentioned previously. This in effect amounts to saying that it is impossible for God to relate what He knows... and this [consequence] is known to be false.⁹

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī

Ghazālī also dealt with the problem in his *al-Iqtisād fī l-i'tiqād*. His solution is obviously indebted to that of his teacher Juwaynī. He argued that miracles are equivalent to a performative speech act that institutes a person as prophet and representative of God. The question of whether the performative speech act is uttered by someone who is truthful or not has no bearing on the validity of the appointment. He wrote:

If a person were to challenge the soldiers in front of a king, claiming that he is the king's emissary and that the king has made it incumbent on them to obey him concerning the division of money and positions, and if they ask him for a proof, he asks the king, who is silent, "O King, if I am truthful in what I claim then indicate this by rising from your throne three times in succession and sitting, contrary to your normal habit." If the king then – after being asked – stood up three times in succession and then sat down, necessary knowledge would occur to those present that he is indeed an emissary, before it might occur to them whether the king habitually leads astray or whether this [i.e., leading astray] is impossible for him... If he [i.e., the king] breaks his habit by his deeds, then this is equipollent to his saying "You are my emissary" and this is the beginning of an appointment and designation as deputy. There can be no falsity in

⁹ Ibid., 334 (l.10ff.).

the case of designating a deputy – this is only conceivable in a statement of facts.¹⁰

Like Juwaynī, Ghazālī anticipated that someone might object that the foregoing point at best establishes that a certain person is indeed a divinely instituted spokesman for God, but that this does not rule out that what God imparts to this spokesman is true. Even if we were all to receive divine revelations without the medium of a prophet, the question would remain: are these revelations true or is God misleading us? Ghazālī's argument for the impossibility of God's Word being false is somewhat different from that given in Juwaynī's *Irshād*. He argued that someone who knows something must have "inner speech" that corresponds to how things truly are. But God's Word is precisely this "inner speech" of an omniscient Being, and this speech cannot be false. He wrote:

Lying can be ruled out for it is a feature of speech, and the speech of God is not a voice or a letter such that it could be mistaken. Rather, it is an attribute (*ma'nā*) subsisting in His exalted Self. For everything that a human knows, there is in his self a declaration (*khabar*) about what he knows that is in accordance with his knowledge, and falsity is inconceivable here. It is similar in the case of God the Exalted.¹¹

To sum up, the strategy of Juwaynī and Ghazālī in ruling out the possibility that God is lying to us relies on two points: the first is to argue that falsity is inconceivable in an omniscient God's eternal and spiritual Word, and the second is to affirm that the appearance of miracles at the hands of a claimant to prophecy is equivalent to a performative speech act such as "I hereby appoint you my spokesman" – the point being that such performative speech acts are not straightforward statements of fact that are assessable in terms of truth or falsity. Interestingly, as will be seen in what follows, several prominent later Ash'arī theologians seem to have believed that the second point is wrong and that the first point is beside the point. Ash'arīs typically made a distinction between the eternal spiritual Word of God (*al-kalām al-nafṣī*) and the created letters and sounds of the Qur'an that are recited and memorized. The arguments of Juwaynī and Ghazālī, if successful, show that the former cannot be false. One still needs, or so a number of later Ash'arī theologians asserted, a

¹⁰ Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī l-i'tiqād*, 199 (l.1ff.).

¹¹ Ibid., 200 (l.5ff.).

separate argument showing that the Arabic Qur'an revealed to mankind cannot be false.¹²

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's treatment of the issue is conspicuously different from that of Juwaynī. In his short compendium *Ma'ālim uṣūl al-dīn*, which appears to have been widely studied in later centuries, he raised the problem by introducing the following objection:

We concede that God has created the miracle for the sake of supporting the claim [of the one who claims prophecy], but why do you say that everyone whom God the Exalted supports is truthful? This can only be assumed if it is established that lying is impossible of God, and if you [Ash'arīs] deny the intrinsic goodness or evilness of God's actions then how can you know that it is impossible that He is lying?¹³

Rāzī's answer is to concede that it is strictly speaking possible that God should make miracles appear at the hands of an imposter but to insist that we can nevertheless know with certainty that this possibility does not obtain. He made an analogy to what we might call radical skeptical scenarios: it is, strictly speaking, possible that everyone I meet has been created *ex nihilo* by God an instant ago, but I can concede this possibility and yet rule it out with certainty. Rāzī wrote:

Something may be possible in itself even though necessary knowledge obtains that it does not occur. Do you not see that the creation of this person here as an old man is possible even though we know with certainty that this did not occur? And if we see a person and are then separated from him and then see him again, we hold it possible that God has annihilated the first man and created another of similar form and character, and yet we firmly assert that this has not happened. It is similar in this case: What you mention of possibilities does indeed obtain, but God has instilled in our minds necessary knowledge, viz. that when we believe that this miracle has been created by God subsequent to the claim of the

¹² Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 498 (l.30ff.).

¹³ Ibn al-Tilimsānī, *Sharḥ Ma'ālim*, 458 (l.11ff.).

one who claims to be a prophet then we know with necessity that He the Exalted has created this so that it may indicate the truth of the claim.¹⁴

Rāzī's strategy appears to be similar to Ghazālī's discussion of radical skeptical scenarios in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*Incoherence of the Philosophers*). In a passage that has been much discussed by modern scholars, Ghazālī anticipated an objection that might be raised against Ash'arī occasionalism and the denial of natural causality. According to the objection, the Ash'arī position leads directly to radical skepticism. We cannot be sure, for example, that there are not "ferocious beasts, raging fires, high mountains or enemies ready with weapons" right in front of us but that God has simply not created in us the visual impressions of these things. Ghazālī wrote in response:

If it is established that the possible is such that there cannot be created for humans knowledge of its nonbeing, then these impossibilities would indeed follow. We are not, however, in doubt concerning the examples you have given because God created for us the knowledge that He did not enact these possibilities. We did not claim that these things are necessary. On the contrary, they are possibilities that may or may not occur. But the continuous habit of their occurrence repeatedly, one time after another, fixes in our minds the belief in their occurrence according to past habit.¹⁵

Ghazālī's response was thus to say that the radical skeptical scenarios are indeed possible in the strict sense that no logical contradiction ensues from supposing them to obtain, but that we can nevertheless rule them out by appealing to the overall constancy in God's habit ('āda), which means that the course of nature is regular and predictable. Ghazālī's response similarly involves stating that we can be confident that a scenario does not obtain even if it is strictly speaking possible.

There is nevertheless an important difference between the cases discussed by Rāzī and Ghazālī. Ghazālī appealed to observable regularities in nature: hitherto, all observed cases of fire coming into contact with dry cotton have been followed by the cotton being burned. This, one might argue, means that we can be justified in believing that this will happen next time fire comes into contact with dry cotton, even if we concede that this is not strictly necessary. But in the case of God's creating miracles in support of imposters, there seems

¹⁴ Ibid. (l.20ff.).

¹⁵ Ghazālī, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 170 (l.16ff.). I have slightly amended Marmura's translation.

to be no observable regularity to which one can appeal. Is it Rāzī's point that hitherto all miracles have been created in support of people who were not imposters, so that we can be confident that this is so when we witness a present miracle? This is surely to beg the question in a blatant manner. More charitably, one might take Rāzī's point to be the following: given certain astounding miracles, we cannot help but form the firm conviction that the person performing these miracles is truly a prophet even if we concede that it is strictly speaking possible that this not be the case. Similarly, when I see an old friend, I cannot help but form the belief that this is the same person I met before, and not someone else looking like him who was created *ex nihilo* a few minutes ago by God, even if I concede that the latter is not impossible. An example offered by Rāzī himself offers support for the more charitable interpretation:

Do you not see that the people of Moses, when they denied his prophecy, God made a mountain hover above them? Whenever they inclined to disobey, the mountain moved toward them, almost falling on them. And whenever they inclined to obey and believe, the mountain moved away. The one who is fair-minded knows that anyone who saw this situation knew with necessity that this indicates [divine] assent [to Moses' claim to be a prophet].¹⁶

It seems clear that the people witnessing the miracle were not reasoning inductively to the truth of Moses' claim to prophecy. Rather, they could not help assenting to the claim, just as I cannot help but assent to the claim that there is a computer right in front of me even though it is strictly speaking possible that I am dreaming or hallucinating.

Juwaynī and Ghazālī, it will be recalled, thought that the following two objections needed separate answers: (1) How can we be sure that miracles indicate the truth of a claim to prophecy? (2) How can we be sure that God is not lying? It is one thing, they noted, to prove that a miracle supports the claim of a person to be a prophet of God, but one still needs a separate argument that what God imparts to this prophet is actually true. Rāzī, in his *Ma'ālim* as well as in his equally influential *Muhaṣṣal*, presented the two objections separately but explicitly gave a single answer to both: it is possible that God creates miracles at the hands of imposters and that God is not truthful, but it is God's habit to create in us necessary knowledge that these possibilities do not obtain consequent to our witnessing sufficiently impressive miracles.¹⁷ But Rāzī seems

¹⁶ Ibn al-Tilimsānī, *Sharḥ Ma'ālim*, 459 (l.5ff.).

¹⁷ Rāzī, *Muhaṣṣal*, 510–11.

to have vacillated on this point. In his voluminous *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya fī l-‘ilm al-ilāhī*, he treated the two objections separately and gave separate answers to each. After having argued – along the lines presented above – that miracles indeed indicate God’s confirmation of a claim to prophecy, he went on to argue that this, together with God’s necessary truthfulness, guarantees the veracity of the prophet. He wrote:

This [the preceding argument] yields certain knowledge that God Most High has created these miracles to assent to prophets and divine emissaries (*li-ajli taṣdīqi l-rusuli wa-l-anbiyā’*). And necessary knowledge obtains to the effect that lying is impossible for God Most High, for it is an attribute of imperfection, and innate knowledge testifies that imperfect attributes cannot subsist in God Most High. Thus, assurance and certainty obtain to the effect that the appearance of miracles indicates the veracity of the prophets (*yadullu ‘alā ṣidqi l-anbiyā’*).¹⁸

This is a most curious argument. How can an Ash‘arī simply help himself to the premise that lying is an imperfection? As the later Ash‘arī theologian ‘Adud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d.756/1355) noted, there seems to be no substantial difference between saying that lying is an imperfection and saying that lying is intrinsically bad.¹⁹ Someone who rejects that actions have intrinsic moral qualities cannot therefore take it as axiomatic that lying is an imperfection. Rāzī’s point was for understandable reasons not echoed in later Ash‘arī writings. But his earlier points do appear to have been widely adopted: that some scenarios can be ruled out with certainty even if they are conceded to be possible, and that astounding miracles inexorably lead to assent to the claim of a person to be a prophet.

Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī

In his voluminous summa of theology *Abkār al-aṣfār*, Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī also wrestled with the problem in a section entitled “On the impossibility of falsehood in the Word of God the Exalted.”²⁰ Āmidī wrote:

The Mu‘tazila have proved the impossibility of falsehood in the Speech of God the Exalted by saying that the Speech is one of His acts and falsehood

¹⁸ Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, 8:99 (l.23ff.).

¹⁹ Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 498 (l. 27ff.).

²⁰ Āmidī, *Abkār al-aṣfār*, 2:83–5.

is repugnant in itself and God the Exalted does not do the repugnant. This is based on their corrupt principle that repugnance and goodness are intrinsic, and on their making it incumbent [on God] to do what is beneficial and best [for creatures]. The refutation of this will follow later.²¹

Āmidī was therefore well aware that an appeal to the intrinsic evil of lying is not available to Ash‘arīs like himself. He continued:

As for our fellows, they have two ways of showing the impossibility of falsehood in the eternal spiritual Speech of God the Exalted: by means of reason and by means of traditional reports.²²

The rational answer given by Āmidī is similar to that of Ghazālī. He argued that God, being omniscient, must be in possession of a spiritual Word (*kalām nafṣi*) that declares things to be as they are. This means that He cannot also be in possession of a spiritual Word that declares things to be other than as they are, for it is impossible to be in possession of a spiritual Word saying two contradictory things. He wrote:

As for the way of reason, it is that we say ... If the declaration of the Lord the Exalted which subsists in Him relates to things contrary to how they are, then one of two things obtains: Either this is with His knowledge or without His knowledge. It is not legitimate to say that it is without His knowledge, for in that case the Lord the Exalted would be ignorant of some things and this is impossible ... If it is with His knowledge, then it is impossible for the one who knows something not to have subsisting in him a declaration of it as it really is – this is known with necessity. In that case, if declaring it to be contrary to what it really is also subsists in him, then there would be in the soul both a declaration that is true and a declaration that is false, relating to the same thing and in the same respect. This is known with necessity to be false.²³

Of course, Āmidī conceded, one might “say” one thing to oneself and yet say another thing to others, as in the case of conscious lying. But what is not possible is to inwardly “say” to oneself two contradictory things.

²¹ Ibid., 83 (l.6ff.).

²² Ibid. (l.10ff.).

²³ Ibid. (l.12ff.).

One problem with the response – of which Āmidī seems to have been aware – is again that Ash‘aris made a distinction between God’s eternal and spiritual Word (*al-kalām al-nafsi*) and the created Arabic words and letters of the Qur’ān. At best, Āmidī’s argument shows that the former is truthful, not the latter. To establish the truth of the latter, Āmidī turned to the second of the adumbrated ways of proving the veracity of God’s Word, viz., traditional reports. He wrote:

As for the way of reports, this is that the truthfulness of the Prophet (upon him be peace) has been established with miracles . . . and he has reported by numerous and independent chains of transmission that the Word of God the Exalted is true and falsehood is impossible for Him, and so this is indubitable.²⁴

Āmidī acknowledged that such an appeal might seem blatantly circular at first sight. He continued thus:

Here there is a problem, for someone might say: The correctness of what has been reported depends on the veracity of the Prophet, and the veracity of the Prophet depends on the impossibility of falsehood in the case of God the Exalted.²⁵

Āmidī then discussed a proposal that would get around this problem. This is in effect the suggestion of Juwaynī and Ghazālī (though Āmidī did not mention any names) that miracles are performative acts on the part of God that institute the person who performs them as a prophet regardless of the veracity of God. He wrote:

It might be said: The establishment of prophecy does not depend on the impossibility of falsehood in the case of God the Exalted for there to be circularity. This is because establishing prophecy does not depend on a declaration – that he is a prophet – which can be true or false. Rather, the appearance of a miracle in support of his challenge [to his contemporaries] is tantamount to an *inshā'* and to anointing him a prophet then and there. This is like someone saying: “I have made you my representative” or “I have made you a deputy.” This does not require truth or falsity.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 84 (l.11ff.).

²⁵ Ibid. (l.15ff.).

²⁶ Ibid., 85 (l.1ff.).

Āmidī, however, rejected the suggestion, on the following ground:

To this we say: If a miracle appears at the hands of someone who does not make a challenge [to his contemporaries] – for this is possible on our principles – then by consensus this does not indicate or establish his prophecy. If the appearance of a miracle at his hands were tantamount to an *inshā'*, then it would follow that he is a prophet to be followed after the appearance of the miracle, and this is not so.²⁷

Even though Āmidī thus rejected this particular suggestion for how to avoid the charge of circularity, he insisted that there is in fact no circularity in appealing to traditional reports in establishing the veracity of God's oral (as opposed to spiritual) Word. This is because the truth of the oral revelation is established by appealing to the prophet's veracity, and in turn the prophet's veracity is established by appealing to the truth of God's eternal spiritual Word. He wrote:

Relying in this way on traditional reports in showing the impossibility of falsehood in the oral Word, which in turn indicates the spiritual Word, is correct just as we have expounded... The truth of the oral Word does depend on the veracity of the prophet but the veracity of the prophet does not depend on the truth of the oral Word but on [the truth of] the spiritual Word. And in this case, there cannot be a vicious circularity.²⁸

Āmidī did not explain exactly how the prophet's veracity may be established by appealing to the truth of God's eternal spiritual Word. The connection is surely not self-evident. Someone (a Christian or a Jew, for example) might accept Āmidī's argument for why God's eternal Word is true and yet dispute the veracity of the Arabic Qur'an conveyed by Muḥammad. In *Għayat al-marām*, an epitome of *Abkār al-afkār*, Āmidī argued the point as follows: God's eternal and spiritual Word must be true, and God's creating miracles at the hands of a claimant to prophecy is tantamount to His assenting to the claim (*nāzilun manzilata l-ikhbāri bi-l-taṣdīq*). Hence, we can be sure that the claim is true.²⁹ Āmidī's overall position, therefore, appears to be this: the eternal, spiritual Word of God must be true (this having been shown by an argument similar to that of Ghazālī). The oral, Arabic Qur'an is also true since its truth is vouchsafed by the Prophet Muḥammad in numerous reports. The truthfulness of the Prophet

²⁷ Ibid. (l.6ff.).

²⁸ Ibid. (l.16ff.).

²⁹ Āmidī, *Għayat al-marām*, 330–1.

Muhammad is in turn shown by the numerous miracles that appeared at his hands, for these miracles are equivalent to a divine assent to Muhammad's claim to be a true prophet.³⁰ One glaring problem with this argument is that it is not clear why one should accept the premise that God's creating miracles at the hands of a claimant to prophecy is tantamount to assenting to the claim. After all, the context is one of ruling out that God could be misleading us all and creating miracles at the hands of people whose pronouncements do not express the eternal and spiritual Word of God. Merely insisting that God's creation of miracles amounts to God's assenting to the claim of prophecy is surely just to duck the issue.

Āmidī dealt at some length with the problem of how miracles support the claims of a prophet in a later section of his *Abkār al-afkār*. He there dealt with the objection that God might have created miracles at the hands of imposters to lead people astray. It is clear, Āmidī wrote, how Mu'tazilis would deal with this objection:

As for their saying: "It may be that this person is a liar and the Lord most High wants to lead us astray with this," the Mu'tazilis have answered that to make ruptures in the natural course of events appear at the hands of liars, and creating the false impression that they are truthful, and mixing truth and falsity thus making it impossible to distinguish between the two, and wanting to lead us astray – all of this is disadvantageous to His servants and leads them away from the rightly-guided path and this is repugnant from God Most High and what is repugnant does not originate

³⁰ One might perhaps argue that there are two issues here: (1) Is a certain person a genuine prophet? (2) Is what this person conveys actually true? In other words, one might argue that a genuine prophet might yet convey falsehoods (if that is what God reveals to him). Even though Juwaynī and Ghazālī seem to have countenanced this possibility, as noted above, I suspect that it is not a real possibility once the truth of God's eternal Word has been established. What would make such a person a genuine prophet if what he conveys to people is false and not a truthful expression of God's eternal (and true) Word? To say that he has been "sent" by God is a mere metaphor and is to no avail. To say that such a prophet acts according to God's Will is also to no avail since Ash'arīs believe that all humans always act in accordance with God's Will. Islamic theologians tend not to be interested in the distinction between a cynical imposter who consciously fabricates falsehoods and a deluded would-be prophet who unwittingly conveys falsehoods. The term "liar" (*kādhib*) is used by them of both cases. In any case, it is clear that Āmidī's argument requires a prophet to be truthful in the sense that what he conveys to people is true. Otherwise, Āmidī cannot show the truth of the Arabic Qur'an by appealing to reports from the Prophet Muhammad.

with Him. But this is based on their corrupt principle that good and evil is intrinsic and that doing what is best [for creatures] is necessary in God's acts, and all of this we have refuted.³¹

It is less clear how Ash'arīs can rule out the possibility that God creates miracles at the hands of imposters since they are committed to the principle that God does as He pleases and that He leads astray whomsoever He wants and that He in fact does so in the case of the infidels. Āmidī wrote that some Ash'arīs nevertheless tried to rule out the possibility that God could create miracles at the hands of imposters. He wrote:

The Shaykh Abū l-Hasan al-Ash'arī [d. 324/935] and some of his followers have opted to say that it is impossible that miracles appear at the hands of the liar and that this is not within God's power for two reasons: One, the miracle indicates truthfulness with certainty as we have explained. There must be some manner in which it does this, even if we are not sure which manner specifically. If it were possible to make miracles appear at the hands of the liar, then this would either indicate his truth or not. If it does, then the liar is made to be truthful which is impossible. If it does not, then what necessarily indicates [truth] has become something else and ceases to have what is necessary for it, and this is impossible. Second, even if the miracle is not connected to the truth of the prophet in the manner of rational indication, nevertheless its indication is necessarily conjoined to assent (*taṣdiq*) as we have explained. So if it were to appear at the hands of the liar it would not be conjoined to assent, and what must be conjoined to assent cannot possibly be supposed not to be so conjoined since this would involve what is necessary ceasing to be necessary.³²

In other words, the two arguments offered here are: (1) We know with certainty that miracles somehow indicate the truth of a prophet's claim. If it were possible that God create miracles at the hands of imposters, then miracles would not offer support to the claims of a prophet in any way, and this is absurd; (2) The appearance of miracles at the hands of a person inexorably leads to assent to his claims among the witnesses to these miracles. If the person is an imposter, then the miracles would lead to necessarily assenting to false claims, and this is absurd. These are hardly impressive arguments, and Āmidī seems to

³¹ Āmidī, *Abkār al-aṣkār*, 4:62 (l.9ff.).

³² Ibid. (l.16ff.).

have preferred an alternative position within the Ash'arī school that he attributed to al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013). On this account, it is within God's power to create miracles at the hands of imposters. Some who held this position went on to argue that this does not imply that creating miracles at the hands of imposters is possible. Āmidī reported the position thus:

Some of them have said: Though the appearance of a miracle at the hands of the liar is within God's Power, this does not imply that its occurrence is possible, even if we suppose breaking the customary order to be permissible. Similarly, what is not in accordance with God's Knowledge cannot occur even if it is within God's Power.³³

Āmidī, however, went on to express his dissatisfaction with this distinction between what is possible and what is within God's power.

Other Ash'arī theologians conceded that it is possible that God create miracles at the hands of imposters, albeit with a significant caveat. In the customary course of things, the appearance of miracles at the hands of a person who claims to be a prophet is followed by necessary knowledge that this claim is true. God may indeed create miracles at the hands of an imposter, but only on condition that He also break the customary course of nature so that the miracle is not followed by necessary knowledge. Otherwise, one would have necessary knowledge of what is in fact false, which is absurd. In Āmidī's words:

Some have said that breaking the customary course of events is not beyond the Power of God Most High as has been mentioned already. Knowledge of the truthfulness of the one at whose hands miracles appear subsequent to his challenge, even if it is customary . . . it is not impossible that custom would be broken – this is within God's Power. This would be by miracles existing subsequent to a challenge without being conjoined to knowledge of the truth of the challenger. On this account, it is not impossible that miracles would appear at the hands of liars, but this is on condition that custom is inverted whereby necessary knowledge of truthfulness does not in fact follow from the appearance of miracles at his hands. Without such breaks in the customary order, it is inconceivable that miracles would appear at his hands, since otherwise one would have necessary knowledge of the truthfulness of the one who is not truthful, and this is absurd.³⁴

33 Ibid., 64 (l.5ff.).

34 Ibid., 63 (l.1ff.).

Āmidī seems to have thought highly of this particular response, describing it as “extremely good and precise” (*fī ghāyat al-husn wa-l-diqla*).³⁵ Nevertheless, it brings out what is arguably a serious problem with using the notion of “necessary knowledge” to rule out the possibility of God lying or misleading us. The problem is one of equivocation. “Necessary knowledge” might be taken to mean (A) “firm conviction that arises necessarily or involuntarily in us” or (B) “firm conviction that arises necessarily or involuntarily in us *and is true*.” The view endorsed by Āmidī – that if God creates miracles at the hands of imposters then these would not be followed by “necessary knowledge” – is only plausible if “necessary knowledge” is understood in the latter sense (B), i.e., as “firm conviction that arises necessarily in us and is true,” for it is obvious that one cannot have true conviction of something false. But there is no reason why miracles performed by imposters should not be followed by “necessary knowledge” in the former sense (A), i.e., “firm conviction that arises necessarily in us.” In fact, when Ash‘arī theologians like Rāzī claim that “necessary knowledge” follows upon the appearance of miracles, their point is *only* plausible if “necessary knowledge” is understood in sense (A), i.e., “firm conviction that arises necessarily in us.” For it is arguably plausible to suggest that, faced with sufficiently astounding miracles, humans cannot help but form the conviction that the person performing these miracles is as he claims to be.³⁶ If, on the other hand, sense (B) is intended, then the situation would be the following: confronted with the objection that God may create miracles at the hands of imposters to mislead us, the Ash‘arī answer is that we can rule out this possibility since the appearance of miracles at the hands of a would-be prophet necessarily gives rise in us to firm *and true* conviction of the veracity of this person. If the miracle had in fact appeared at the hands of an imposter then we would simply not have had firm *and true* conviction of his veracity. This is obviously not so much an answer to the problem as a dogmatic refusal to face up to it.³⁷

35 Ibid., 64 (l.4).

36 One obvious problem here that I shall not pursue is why so many of the Prophet Muhammad’s contemporaries refused to acknowledge him as a prophet of God even though they supposedly witnessed all his miracles.

37 David Hume famously stated that skeptical arguments “admit of no answer and produce no conviction” (*Enquiries concerning Human Understanding*, §122). The Ash‘arī position discussed here is somewhat similar: the point that God could be misleading us all does indicate a genuine possibility but nevertheless fails to produce any conviction once we are confronted with sufficiently impressive miracles. The difference seems to be that the Ash‘arīs in question apparently wish to argue that the failure to produce conviction in us is itself a refutation of the problematic skeptical suggestion. This is surely simply to beg the question whether God is misleading us.

The problem may be put in somewhat different terms: let us suppose that we are witnessing an astounding miracle performed by a person claiming to be a prophet. How do we know if we have necessary knowledge in sense (A) or sense (B)? Only sense (B) would allow us to infer the truth of the person's claim, but from the first-person perspective there seems to be no difference between having necessary knowledge in sense (A) or sense (B). To insist without any argument that the miracle is followed by necessary knowledge in sense (B) is simply to beg the question.

Conclusion

Islamic supporters of “divine-command ethics” were faced with the problem of how to rule out that God is lying to us or leading us astray by creating miracles at the hands of imposters and liars. The attempted solutions sketched above continued to be expounded in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Ash'arī handbooks on theology by scholars such as 'Aqdūd al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 793/1390), and Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490), though in slightly different combinations and with minor amendments.³⁸ I have indicated some problems with these attempted solutions. But it would be well to remember that supporters of the view that acts have intrinsic moral qualities, though they might at first sight appear to have less of a problem dismissing the suggestion that God is lying, were faced with another and arguably equally intractable problem, viz. the problem of evil: Why is there horrendous suffering in our world when God is omnipotent and could easily prevent it? Why, for example, did He not prevent the Black Death of the fourteenth century that may have killed off more than a fourth of the entire population of Europe and the Middle East, or the even more deadly infectious diseases that decimated the Native American population in the sixteenth century? Why did He create Satan knowing that he would rebel and make it his business to deceive humans and divert them from the right path? Indeed, the “problem of evil” comes back to haunt Mu'tazilī arguments for why God does not lie or mislead us. After all, it is not at all clear why a God who allows devastating plagues and natural disasters that claim the lives of millions of innocent people should not also allow imposters and liars to produce wondrous miracles in support of their claims to speak on His behalf.

³⁸ Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 498–9, 549–50; Taftazānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, 2:177–9; Sanūsī, *Umdat ahl al-tawfiq*, 245–50; Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Āqīda al-Wuṣṭā*, 249–53.

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Administrators' Time: The Social Memory of the Early Medieval State, East and West

Chris Wickham

Some time in the late 940s, in Baghdad, in the presence of the Büyid minister Abū Makhlad, there was a discussion of “generosity and the generous, munificence and the munificent, and the gifts which the Barmakids and others used to lavish upon people.” Abū Makhlad expressed his doubts about the truth of such stories. Thereupon the scholar Ibn al-Munajjim recalled that, in a similar discussion in the 880s, the vizier Ṣā‘id b. Makhlad, equally disbelieving, was then asked by a courtier why such stories of generosity, true or false, were not told about him, “from whom something was to be hoped or feared, whereas the Barmakids were dead, and could do neither good nor harm.” It had been a put-down in the 880s, and was again in the 940s.¹ Nor was it the only time that the Barmakids were used as a touchstone of this type. Yahyā b. Khālid al-Barmak and his two sons were major architects of the highly elaborate and successful ‘Abbāsid administrative and fiscal system, and were also famous for their abrupt and tragic destruction in 803 by a jealous Hārūn al-Rashīd; but they were, above all, renowned among later generations for their remarkable generosity.² Many clients of senior administrators gained favor and reward by comparing their patrons to the Barmakids; many who were rewarded did so in gratitude as well.³ They were the gold standard. And al-Rashīd was not, for

1 Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara* (henceforth *NM*: see below, n. 4), 1:11–12. I must make clear from the start that I am not an Arabist, and will cite Arabic, and also Chinese, sources only through translations. This indefensible procedure has the (mild) justification that I am here attempting a cross-cultural analysis, extending from the Roman empire, through Iraq, to China. For stimulating parallels to this, see the comparative chapters in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, 431–627. Such a stretch is also a tribute to Patricia Crone, who has never shied away from such comparisons, as reading her footnotes makes quite clear. I am very grateful to Julia Bray, Tom McCaskie, and Naomi Standen for critiquing this text for me, to Rachel Moss for good advice, and to Julia Bray, Glen Dudbridge, and Naomi Standen for making available difficult-to-find books and articles.

2 Arab historians on 803: Bouvat, *Les Barmécides*, 75–93 (111–12 for generosity); El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, 31–53. The Barmakids and government: Kennedy, “The Barmakid Revolution.”

3 *NM*, 1:12, 12–13, 42–3; 2:95.

all his later fame in the *Thousand and One Nights* (together with his Barmakid drinking companion Ja‘far b. Yahyā), he does not receive anything like the same attention in stories like these.

Many such accounts appear in the work of al-Muḥassīn b. ‘Alī al-Tanūkhī (d. 994), a *qādī* and career administrator in Büyid Iraq, and author of at least two classic *adab* texts. The focus of this article is the *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara*, roughly translatable as “Elegant Conversations,” begun in 971 and written over the next 20 years in a period in which al-Tanūkhī knew both political favor and disgrace. The *Nishwār*, which only survives in part, is the text he wrote which contains most reference to political figures, but it, like his other works, is essentially a set of stories (*akhbār*), set out (as he explains in the introduction) in order to improve the standard of educated conversation in Baghdad, and also the general understanding of how nobly people could behave in the past, and what consequences good and bad actions have.⁴ Al-Tanūkhī was here expressing some of the principal educative aims of *adab*, the “polite education” or *Bildung* based on rhetoric, storytelling, statecraft, poetic and calligraphic skill, and quite recondite general knowledge, which marked the administrative and scientific/philosophical communities. This was where his principal loyalty lay, as we shall see. But he was also a *qādī*, a judge (he was a Hanafi and also a Mu‘tazilī, a family tradition), and thus also trained in *ḥadīth* and legal scholarship, the alternative and overlapping network of religious-based knowledge called *‘ilm* (the community of religious scholars was and is called the *‘ulamā’*, a word derived from *‘ilm*). This latter training explains the fact that most of his stories contain an initial *isnād* or chain of authorities, which was intended to vouch for their authenticity, and which furthermore helped to make up for their essential orality, about which he expresses insincere unease

⁴ The *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara*, originally in 11 volumes, is most recently and fully edited by ‘Abbūd al-Shālījī in 8 volumes; three of these, vols. 1, 3 and 8, were earlier edited and translated as *Table-Talk* by David Margoliouth, the version I shall cite (note that Margoliouth was misled by the manuscript into calling the second of these vol. 2; I will maintain that error when citing him; I will cite vol. 1 by page, and the others by the internal chapters). But, in fact, the other volumes in Arabic are filled out by the editor with other materials, citing al-Tanūkhī, taken from other Arabic writers, in a move characterized as a “tendentiel irreführend Herausgebertrick,” a tendentially misleading editorial trick, by Hartmut Fähndrich, “Die Tischgespräche,” 83 (although this may be over-critical; we shall see later that we can make considerable use of texts surviving in fragmentary form). Only small portions of the full text (parts of the real vol. 2) were discovered later than Margoliouth’s edition and translation. Fähndrich’s important article is the only substantial study focused on the *Nishwār* that I have found. For the author’s career, see Fähndrich, “Al-Tanūkhī,” *EI*²; al-Tanūkhī, *Il solleovo*, 12–15; Khalifa, *Hardship and Deliverance*, 7–11; for his family background, Bray, “Place and Self-Image.”

in his introduction. But they are also good stories, and some of them recur in the *Thousand and One Nights* itself.⁵

Al-Tanūkhī is hardly unknown. He has several recent studies, particularly by Julia Bray, as a literary figure. He is also regularly used as a source by historians, especially for the period *ca* 870–960, even if with some expressed unease about his reliability.⁶ His reliability will not be an issue here; whether or how far his stories are true or false is irrelevant for my argument. His importance here is above all as a guide to social memory, and, to be precise, the social memory of the class of people who were both his sources and his audience: the educated administrative elite of Baghdad and other major Iraqi cities. Memory is social in large part, in that it is constructed by social groups, through talking; true or false, it constitutes the agreed past for such groups, and is thus a key element in their identities. What sorts of things about their past Iraqi administrators thought it most important to remember and talk about, administrators' time as I shall call it here, is therefore one of the best guides we have to how they structured their values and their position in the world, and, more widely, constructed themselves as a community.⁷ That collective discourse is well attested in tenth-century Iraq. It would be possible to analyze it through the works of more "orthodox" historians, and I shall indeed return to them briefly; but al-Tanūkhī has the great advantage that he does not aim at any wider (including chronological) narrative completeness, and his accounts of the past are therefore not deflected by any more abstract or religious/philosophical sense of what "history" should contain, and how it should be written, as it certainly is in the otherwise widely differing historical works of both al-Ṭabarī and Miskawayh.⁸ Al-Tanūkhī of course did have constraints, both in the values

5 For *isnāds* in al-Tanūkhī, see Khan, *Studies*, 219–20 (who overstates his case), and Bray, "Isnāds and Models of Heroes," 15–16; eadem, "Place and Self-Image," 64, also argues that his *isnāds* reflect and showcase the important role his older relatives had in the transmission of his stories. For al-Tanūkhī's Mu'tazilism, see Bray, "Practical Mu'tazilism," and Khalifa, *Hardship and Deliverance*, 16–28; for his attachment to and development of *adab*, Bray, "Abbasid Myth," 46–8. For the *Nights*, see e.g., Irwin, *The Arabian Nights*, 83–4.

6 E.g., Sourdel, *Le vizirat*, 36. For Bray, see the bibliography. See also Khalifa, *Hardship and Deliverance*, a monographic study, which emphasizes al-Tanūkhī's specifically religious intent more than I do here; partly because she concentrates on another of his works, *al-Faraj ba'd al-shidda*, partly because she gives a religious (Mu'tazili) reading to some narratives which seem to me almost entirely secular – for an example, see below, n. 21.

7 See in general Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*.

8 See Khan, *Studies*, 204–9; Arkoun, *L'humanisme arabe*, 331–7, for comparisons between the latter two. For the main lines of the historiographical traditions, see above all Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*.

he sought to uphold and in the dictates of genre – this is how stories should be told, this is the moral they ought to demonstrate – as all narrative inevitably has; many of his stories were doubtless also invented by himself, not told to him. He groups his *akhbār*, to make points (often highly moralistic ones, although the morality is not always that of conventional religion). Otherwise, however, it is the internal structure of each which is dominant, not some wider pattern.⁹ I shall use him as an initial guide to administrative memory; add to that a briefer comparison with his contemporary, Miskawayh; and then offer a comparison with the administrative memory of two other early states, the later Roman empire of the sixth century, and tenth-century China.

Central to al-Tanūkhī's political narratives are viziers. The prominent viziers of the caliphate of al-Muqtadir (908–32), Ibn al-Furāt (d. 924), and ‘Alī b. ‘Isā (d. 945) constantly recur, and many of their predecessors, contemporaries, and successors almost as often, from the Barmakids down to al-Muhallabī (d. 963), who was the powerful vizier of the first Būyid ruler of Iraq, Mu‘izz al-Dawla (945–67), and also al-Tanūkhī's first patron. Ibn al-Furāt and ‘Alī b. ‘Isā, rivals but each with considerable respect for the other, had well-determined characters in Arabic narratives, the former harsh and impulsive, the latter retiring, humorless and exact; but both were seen as committed financial administrators and indeed reformers, inside the severe constraints of a period when the caliphal regime was nearly bankrupt.¹⁰ Al-Tanūkhī wrote for people who already knew this, so it was not necessary for him to specify the particular nature of their age, in which it was common for viziers to be abruptly dismissed, but then reappointed later. Ibn al-Furāt served three times, ‘Alī twice, but the latter was the power behind the nominal vizier at least twice more. Viziers and other administrators had since the mid-ninth century routinely been shaken down after losing office, through heavy-handed and often violent demands by their successors that they disgorge the money they had accumulated illegally during their tenure, a process which became semi-institutionalized, called *muṣādara* or *muṭālaba*.¹¹ Under al-Muqtadir, however, the ups and downs of vizieral careers – and of the careers of the senior administrators in their immediate clienteles – were extreme, and it was common for someone to be cast down from the height of wealth and power, tortured until he revealed where his money was, imprisoned, and then reappointed with his wealth restored, all

⁹ Fähndrich, “Die Tischgespräche,” 94–101. See in general El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, a model methodological account.

¹⁰ See, exhaustively, Sourdel, *Le vizirat*, 387–469, 495–551 – using Miskawayh and Hilāl (see below) especially. Mutual respect: *NM*, 1:30, 8:44.

¹¹ Bosworth, “Muṣādara,” *EI*².

in the space of a few years. Even in earlier years, careers were regularly interrupted; al-Tanūkhī remarks that the vizier al-Fadl b. Marwān (d. ca 845) was said to be the only *kātib*, a clerk or secretary (pl. *kuttāb*), in the entire 'Abbāsid period to have been continuously in office from early adulthood to death.¹²

This continual carousel of career changes created its own standard set of social dramas. *Kuttāb* had a group loyalty which did not always work in practice, but could certainly be invoked as an ideal, with common profession being equated to a tie of kinship, according to an elderly clerk from the Umayyad period, still alive in al-Rashīd's time, in one of the earliest dated stories in the *Nishwār*.¹³ More practically, loyalty to one's original patron, who had plucked one out of the ordinary run of *kuttāb*, was normal and praiseworthy, and there are numerous stories which attest to this; entire clienteles of administrators rose and fell together as a result. Conversely, one of the ways of rising in the official hierarchy was to undermine the career of rivals, and maybe one's patron might turn out to be among them; such ungratefulness was regrettable but not uncommon, and one had thus to guard against not only open rivals but hungry clients as well. 'Alī b. 'Isā knew well that Ibn Muqla, also three times vizier, was one such, and took care to humiliate him publicly by showing up his bad draftsmanship of official documents, shortly before being replaced by him.¹⁴ The moment of dismissal and subjection to *muṣādara* was also one of serious risk. Administrators could be killed then, or die under torture; but, above all (given that such deaths were a minority), it was also unpredictable how much money would be demanded, and how violently. Needless to say, the accumulation of money illegally was under these circumstances not only attractive, but necessary, for one needed to have something to give up if faced with violence. Conversely, violence was itself risky, as the victim might rule again later and take revenge in like fashion (this frequently happened);¹⁵ but it might also seem to be necessary, because it was the only way of gaining control of often elaborately hidden hoards of money which the dismissed man persistently claimed he did not have. And the treatment of disgraced administrators by their former colleagues was also fraught with risk; support for them was dangerous, of course, but lack of support would again potentially bring revenge if or when the man concerned regained power.

This is the structural underpinning of large numbers of al-Tanūkhī's stories. When the future vizier 'Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān fell in 878, a Jewish clerk

¹² *NM*, 8:13.

¹³ *NM*, 8:12; see e.g., Mottahadeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 108–10.

¹⁴ *NM*, 1:29–30.

¹⁵ An explicit example of this is *NM*, 8:18, but there are many others.

called Sahl b. Nāzir, foreseeing his return to power, gave 100 dinars every month to his family while he was in prison and after, and benefited very considerably when ‘Ubayd Allāh finally became vizier in 891; when Sahl later did the same for a senior *kātib* called Jarāda, whom ‘Ubayd Allāh himself had sacked and sent to Basra, ‘Ubayd Allāh got to hear of it and menaced him, but Sahl pointed out how similar the two situations were and ‘Ubayd Allāh apologized. Al-Tanūkhī gives a first-person account by one of his main sources, Ibn ‘Ayyāsh, that when young he had been a friend of Sulayman b. al-Hasan before he became vizier in 930, and continued to frequent him quite casually in front of all the *kuttāb* thereafter, until one of the latter called him out: “do you happen to possess 50,000 dinars?” explaining that, if he was that intimate with the vizier, he would need them to avoid torture when the vizier fell. Ibn ‘Ayyāsh apologized, pleading inexperience, and thereafter kept his visits to a minimum at formal moments. Ibn al-Jaṣṣāṣ, the goldsmith and high-level political dealer, whom al-Tanūkhī depicts as an amiable rogue (he was not a *kātib*), had sheltered al-Muqtadir’s caliphal rival Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in 908, and was later fined the enormous sum of 6 million dinars; it took a friend to point out to him that he had over a million left, which was still a vast amount, with his reputation undamaged because people assumed he had twice that, and this brought him back to good humor. So, was Ibn al-Jaṣṣāṣ a fool, as stories say? Not really; al-Tanūkhī says he met his son in 961, who said that his father had played stupid so that viziers would not fear him. The son told a story that Ibn al-Furāt “in one of his vizierates” began to hate Ibn al-Jaṣṣāṣ, to insult him and to try to bring him down; after failing to sleep one night the latter went to Ibn al-Furāt’s palace and woke him up, demanding to speak to him in private. Ibn al-Jaṣṣāṣ then said: “you are trying to ruin me. I offer a compromise. If you do not accept it, I shall go at once to the caliph and offer him 2 million dinars to replace you; you know quite well that he will take the money; your successor, who will be grateful to me, will then torture you at my request until he gets the 2 million back.” Ibn al-Furāt was aghast, and asked what the alternative was; it was an oath of friendship and alliance. They swore it, and Ibn al-Furāt publicly readmitted him to favor.¹⁶

“Corruption” (as we would call it) was of course a bad thing; Ibn al-Furāt was more prone to it than was ‘Alī b. Īsā, which was a point against him, and al-Tanūkhī has a couple of stories of administrators (one of them his own rela-

16 Respectively, *NM*, 2:14, cf. 8:59, parallel but with more danger attached; 1:133–5; 1:16–25, cf. 1:271–4 for more of Ibn al-Jaṣṣāṣ’ political dealing. (*Miskawayh*, *Tajārib*, 4:39, gives different figures for his fine and his wealth; al-Mas‘ūdī is closer to al-Tanūkhī: al-Mas‘ūdī, *Les prairies d’or*, 8:283.)

tive) meeting moral people who point out the peculation involved at all levels of tax raising; the administrators leave their posts, or refuse their salaries, as a result.¹⁷ But quite a lot of peculation was also regarded as sensible, almost virtuous, to preserve honor (and, of course, as a bulwark against misfortune). Abū Ishāq al-Zajjāj was tutor to al-Qāsim b. ‘Ubayd Allāh, and asked him what he would do for his tutor if ever he became vizier; if that happened, al-Zajjāj would like 20,000 dinars. “That was the limit [i.e., rather low] of my desires.” When al-Qāsim became vizier in 901, he offered al-Zajjāj the role of the acceptor of petitions from citizens, until the gifts offered would reach that sum of money, and continually advised him that he was asking too little. Al-Zajjāj got the hang of it, and did not tell the vizier when the 20,000 had been reached; he did not call time until the sum had reached double that. Even then, al-Qasim refused to let him stop, pointing out that people would think he had been dismissed, and he would lose all his status/influence (*jāh*) in the eyes of the people. Earlier, al-Qāsim’s father ‘Ubayd Allāh had hidden in the house of the tradesman Ibn Abī ‘Awf between his own vizierates, and had then stood up to welcome him when he was reappointed; the caliph got to hear of this and reprimanded ‘Ubayd Allāh for honoring a tradesman, so the vizier declared to Ibn Abī ‘Awf that he was in trouble unless he had 100,000 dinars for the emergency of a “reversal of fortune,” plus enough to live in comfort for ever. ‘Ubayd Allāh thus arranged that Ibn Abī ‘Awf would profit from the price-fixing of grain, plus from gifts for hearing petitions – gifts again fixed by the vizier at higher than Ibn Abī ‘Awf would have thought of asking. In another case, two corrupt tax officials stayed in post under al-Muqtadir because the caliph did not want to dismiss them, “in order to maintain the dignity of the collector’s office in the eyes of the merchants.” In an account preserved in one of al-Tanūkhi’s other works, Ibn Abī Allān, one of his younger contemporaries, told how he was part of the administrative elite of Ahwāz when a new tax official came in from Baghdad who planned to subject them all to *muṭālaba* and lose them the year’s profits. Ibn Abī Allān was asked to pay him off, but this did not work; he then said: “maybe you’ve already been dismissed; then we will get off anyway and you won’t even get the money.” This convinced the tax official; Ibn Abī Allān went to the money-changer to get the “bribe,” and the official gave him a

¹⁷ *NM*, 1:117–20, 2:31 (cf. Bray, “Practical Mu‘tazilism,” 116–17). Note that the concept of “corruption,” as also the related concept of the “bribe,” are not scientifically neutral ones; there is, in particular, no word for “bribe” in many languages, and condemnatory discourse thus hangs on the transactional question of whether any given gift is a proper one or not (see e.g., Wickham, “Conclusion,” 252–4). I shall put the word, and that of “corruption,” inside inverted commas as a result.

certificate to attest the end of the *muṭālaba*. Five days later the official actually was dismissed and came to thank him.¹⁸

“Corruption” could thus sometimes be almost playful; but it was also a necessary part of the display of government, not least to preserve the public face, the honor, the *jāh*, of the official stratum as a whole. This was true not just for central government administrators, but also for *qādīs*, as in the story of the *qādī* Abū ‘Umar, whose expensive robe was criticized by the austere ‘Alī b. Ḥisā, and who replied (to the latter’s embarrassment) that the vizier could get away with cheap clothing because he only had to deal with elites, who knew what he was doing, but that a *qādī*, as a judge, had to deal with the poor, whom he needed to impress. That governors, too, overspent on hospitality and display did not just mean that they were corrupt; it also meant that they were showing the munificence appropriate to a caliphal representative.¹⁹ But it is worth adding that the text of the *Nishwār*, taken as whole, has as its backdrop the fact that the money coming into Baghdad from the taxation of the provinces, notwithstanding the fact that it stuck to the fingers of every intermediary (and the fact that the late ‘Abbāsid caliphate was losing provinces and thus revenues regularly, particularly between ca 910 and ca 945), was so huge in scale that it produced windfalls of all kinds – for example, to quite humble artisans who happened to do random favors to the powerful, as when al-Muhallabī went drinking in Basra and was caught short on the way back to his barge, used the latrine of a potter, and handed him 1,000 dinars in thanks, double the price of his house (al-Tanūkhī has several similar stories, but was actually present on this occasion).²⁰ Taking gifts like this, and taking money as it went through one’s fingers for official purposes, melt into one another in the *Nishwār*, and the implication is that they were on the same spectrum. Maintaining honor also had some relatively unexpected spin-offs in this sort of environment. A clerk forged a letter of Ibn al-Furāt to the governor of Egypt, and took it to the latter; it said that he had done a service to the vizier and that Ibn al-Furāt requested the governor to reward him. The governor suspected its authenticity, as it was too florid for his rank, and sent it to Ibn al-Furāt to check. The latter said to his censorious friends, who argued for punishment, that the man had taken the trouble of journeying to Egypt to trade on the vizier’s honor; he had “set forth in search of fortune making of us his lever;” he deserved reward not

¹⁸ Respectively, *NM*, 1:46–8 (for *jāh* see Fähndrich, “Die Tischgespräche,” 104–15, for a valuable analysis of its multivalency and its importance as a guiding cultural concept in this world); 1:48–50; 8:11; *al-Faraj ba’d al-shidda*, partial trans. as al-Tanūkhī, *Il solleovo*, no. 260.

¹⁹ *NM*, 1:31, 8:44.

²⁰ *NM*, 1:42, cf. 41–2, 68–9, 2:95.

punishment. Ibn al-Furāt told the governor that the letter was genuine, and, when the forger returned to Baghdad to thank him, employed him (though not without checking his qualifications as a *kātib*).²¹

And that last point, finally, points to another crucial element of this world: a genuine respect for competence. Al-Muhallabī held that “luck is nothing more than activity with humility;” it did not last if attached to the unqualified. It was a serious flaw that Ibn al-Furāt needed two amanuenses to write a letter whereas ‘Alī b. ‘Isā did not; two extra people would know the secret. Ibn al-Furāt was also held responsible by Ibn ‘Ayyāsh, who said it to al-Tanūkhī, for degrading the office of *qādī* by appointing unqualified people, which was the first step to the degrading of the office of vizier, and then that of caliph: “the collapse of the ‘Abbāsid power is due to the collapse of the judicature.” The legendary vizier Ibn al-Zayyāt (d. 847), a cruel and unpleasant but also able man, survived the accession of the caliph al-Wāthiq in 842, whom he had beaten and deprived of property during the reign of his father and who had therefore sworn to kill him, because he was the only man who could write an appropriate letter announcing the caliph’s accession; al-Wāthiq said, “The sultan needs Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik [i.e., Ibn al-Zayyāt] more than Muḥammad needs the sultan.” Al-Tanūkhī has a parallel story of his own great-uncle, who was a *kātib* under ‘Alī b. ‘Isā, and who was involved in a complicated feud with a colleague; the vizier backed him solely because he could draft a document properly.²² We shall see later that this last – like, doubtless, several other themes in these accounts – has something of the status of a folk motif; but it faithfully reflects the fact that professionalism was one of the crucial elements that the world of administrators valued and indeed needed.

This was a complex world, then, and densely described. There is indeed an entire study of political etiquette which could be made on the basis of this material. But there are important absences. Al-Tanūkhī has barely a word about military history; the army is entirely outside his mind-set, even after 936 and the military takeover of the administrative system. (The Büyids appear; but not as army leaders, only as rulers, i.e., as the successors to the caliphal regime, which, as we have just seen, is depicted as having collapsed).²³ This certainly

²¹ *NM*, 1:36–7 (for a religious reading of this story, less plausible to me, see Khalifa, *Hardship and Deliverance*, 202–3); also 37–9 for a similar story.

²² Respectively, *NM*, 1:63; 2:21; 1:123–5; 8:4; 1:114.

²³ The clearest sign of this is a brief (and often quoted) commentary on the caliph al-Rādī (934–40), *NM*, 1:159, “the last caliph to do many things:” to compose verse, to lead armies, to administer finance, to say Friday prayers in public, to hold court, and to live in proper caliphal style.

reflects the relative lack of involvement of the *kuttāb* in military activity, and we find it in other *adab* writers too. But one figure we might expect to find is also barely visible: the caliph himself, the head of state.

We cannot say that caliphs are absent; they have been invoked several times in the foregoing. But they are rarely protagonists in their own right; they are simply there as the people who have the right to hire and fire viziers, the ultimate authors of their power and their reversals of fortune. The early ninth-century caliphs, al-Ma'mun for example, are given directive roles on occasion, but not more often than their own viziers. Al-Tanūkhī recounts, via two authorities, a story of Abū al-'Aynā', an *adib* of the circle of Jāḥiẓ, who retired to Basra after 893 following a long absence in the then capital, Samarra, to find a leading traditionist and religious expert there called Abū Khalīfa. The latter could not however in any way compete in public with Abū al-'Aynā's array of stories of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–61), and various court celebrities including poets. Here, *adab* decisively beat *'ilm* in the minds of their audience (at least according to al-Tanūkhī, who knew both spheres of knowledge, as we have seen, and whose preferences are obvious), but those stories did, on this occasion, include caliphal ones. All the same, al-Tanūkhī himself does not tell us those stories; al-Mutawakkil is only cited a handful of times, and only once as a protagonist.²⁴ The great dramatic caliphal events, such as the civil war of the 810s, or the complex underpinnings of the murder of al-Mutawakkil himself, are certainly entirely overlooked; al-Tanūkhī knew them quite well – everybody did – but they were not relevant to the sort of history the *Nishwār* was intended to contain.

Some caliphs and other rulers are more visible. Al-Mu'tadid (892–902), arguably the last really effective caliph, is a protagonist in several stories, and we find, although less often, his father the regent al-Muwaffaq, and the Büyid Mu'izz al-Dawla and the Ḥamdānid Sayf al-Dawla, in similar roles. Al-Mu'tadid, in particular, is given the opportunity to make wise choices or wise observations, which front him more than any other ruler – almost as much as the viziers – and which certainly help to move al-Tanūkhī's moral messages along.²⁵ These four are, however, the only rulers who are really flagged. Most other

²⁴ *NM*, 2:24; cf. 1:138, 2:61, 8:3 (the only one where the caliph acts), 15, 86. For al-Ma'mun, see e.g., 1:71–4.

²⁵ For al-Mu'tadid, *NM*, 1:142–4, 152–4, 172–5, 238–40, 2:58, 98, 8:34. See Bray, "A Caliph and His Public Relations," 163–7, for al-Mu'tadid represented in sources (e.g., *NM*, 1:172–4) as deliberately crafting his reputation; and Malti-Douglas, "Texts and Tortures," for the caliph's highly ambiguous (indeed, often monstrous) later image and its manipulations in different genres.

references are simply to frame vizieral or other *kuttāb* stories, or to date events – and, even then, by far the commonest dating element is by which vizier was in office at the time. It might be thought that, since so many of al-Tanūkhī's stories take place during the reign of al-Muqtadir, notoriously the most ineffective caliph of all, and under whose rule the 'Abbāsid political system went into a fiscal and military involution from which it would not recover, that caliphal absence simply reflected empirical reality. Al-Mu'taqid, too, was certainly stressed so much because caliphal power broke down shortly after his death (as al-Tanūkhī indeed says, several times),²⁶ and this might be a marker of the fact that an al-Tanūkhī a century earlier would have made caliphs much more important. But, if caliphs ever had been central to administrative narratives, the relevant stories did not maintain their usefulness as constituent of the social memory which marked administrators' time by the later tenth century. Indeed, it is also striking that Mu'nis al-Khādim (d. 933), al-Muqtadir's capable and prominent strongman for most of his reign, barely appears either – he is only mentioned twice, both casually. And the Büyids, whose power was unmediated until well after al-Tanūkhī died, are not that much more visible: even under Mu'izz al-Dawla, stories mostly stopped at the vizier too, and 'Aqūd al-Dawla, al-Tanūkhī's patron (and Miskawayh's hero), once again hardly appears at all.²⁷ Administrators, that is to say, certainly knew plenty of things about rulers, but a text which shows the administrative sense of the relevant past as clearly as the *Nishwār* does had no need to talk about them; rulers were not at the front of their minds when the past was invoked.

Viziers themselves may have looked to caliphs, then – or to their strongmen (we know from other sources that 'Alī b. Ṭsā was very close to Mu'nis)²⁸ – but their subordinates and clients, and the world of their talking which creates social memory, did not. Given the substantial length of the partial text of the *Nishwār* that we do have, this cannot easily be chance; the memory of the caliphs was marginal to the world of clerks and judges which formed al-Tanūkhī's political and social horizon. They were not part of administrators' time, which was focused on the administrative community itself, and really little else.

²⁶ E.g., *NM*, 1:152–4, in the voice of al-Mu'taqid himself.

²⁷ 'Aqūd al-Dawla: *NM*, 2:8, 92, 114, 120, very casual references; Mu'nis: *NM*, 1:141, 8:11. The same is true of al-Muqtadir's dominant mother, Shaghab: see in general El Cheikh, "Gender and Politics," this is an appropriate moment to signal what by now must be fairly obvious, that administrators' time was irredeemably male.

²⁸ Sourdel, *Le vizirat*, 398, 453.

How typical is al-Tanūkhī here? There were of course still plenty of histories of caliphs and wars in the al-Ṭabarī tradition, going past the latter's end-date of 915 and into the tenth century. Likewise, al-Mas'ūdī, although distinct in many ways, has caliphs (and also poets) in his primary field of vision in the early tenth-century period we are focusing on here, and viziers far less.²⁹ But this simply tells us what we already knew, that the political society of Baghdad and neighboring cities was highly complex, and had a wide array of micro-societies with their own social memories. In the world of administrators, al-Tanūkhī is certainly entirely typical of one genre, the several examples of books called *Kitāb al-wuzarā'*, "The Book of Viziers," of which that covering al-Tanūkhī's period, by Hilāl al-Ṣābi' (we have surviving sections of it dealing with Ibn al-Furāt and 'Alī b. Ḥisā), actually draws substantially from the *Nishwār*, although in part reformats it chronologically. These texts certainly do not look to caliphs, and focus entirely on vizieral careers, divided into separate vizierates, including their detailed administrative acts. We can at least say that it is significant that this genre of text exists at all. But its existence did not have to show a wider indifference to the caliphate among such writers, for an earlier author of a vizieral history, al-Ṣūlī (who was among other things a teacher to al-Tanūkhī), also wrote an account of the caliph al-Rāḍī and his immediate successor, in whose personal entourage he had actually been, which fronts the caliph in a way that is directly opposed to the administrative patterns that we have so far seen (and will see again in Miskawayh). Al-Ṣūlī was not only a *kātib*, and did not only have an administrative mind-set, although he could show it if the genre required.³⁰ But it is also interesting to compare al-Tanūkhī to Miskawayh as administrator historians. Miskawayh (d. 1030) came out of the same circle as al-Tanūkhī, for both were clients of al-Muhallabī and later of 'Adud al-Dawla, and they must have known each other, although they must also have been rivals – al-Tanūkhī never cites Miskawayh as an informant, and the former is not discussed by the latter either (though he is in the latter's continuators).³¹ This is not surprising; Miskawayh's reputation as a historian is high and growing; people argue whether al-Tanūkhī counts as a historian

²⁹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*: Vol. 8 covers the period.

³⁰ Al-Ṣābi', *Historical Remains*; for al-Ṣūlī, Sourdel, "Fragments" (for the citations of his *Kitāb al-Awrāq* in other authors; they resemble Hilāl), and Canard, *Akhbār ar-Rāḍī billāh* (for the caliphal account). For al-Ṣūlī and Miskawayh, see also El Cheikh, "The Abbasid and Byzantine Courts," 520–7.

³¹ For the continuators, Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 6:12–14, 421–2; cf. Khan, *Studies*, 217–20.

at all;³² the extreme contrast in their approach to the past perhaps would not ever have made them friends.

Monographs dedicated to Miskawayh focus on his use of evidence and on his wider philosophy (given that his long and influential history, the *Tajārib al-Umam*, is not his only work). He is trusted and praised for his understanding of institutional and socio-economic structures, which is indeed rare for any medieval historian. He has come to be seen as a sort of cross between Thucydides and Machiavelli, committed to the view that every sort of event will recur, and so a correct understanding of how it happened will be of use to successors, but also as more preoccupied with the immediate consequences of political error or the longer term deleterious effects of political incompetence than with overt moralizing about bad behavior.³³ How he actually constructed the *Tajārib* is not quite so much studied. It is likely, for example, that he was more dependent on the lost history of Thābit b. Sinān than even his fairly regular citations of it make clear (for one thing, the part of his own history which is seen as independent of al-Ṭabarī begins in 908, when Thābit's history also started). The careful structuring of his (or Thābit's?) work also deserves analysis, as with his choice to give, gradually, more and more space to the rise of the Būyids rather than to the history of the caliphal government in Iraq in the 930s, as part of a rhetorical build-up to the inevitability and desirability of present-day Būyid government in Iraq and Iran. The famous passage concerning al-Rāḍī's voluntary handover of all power in Baghdad to the warlord Ibn Rā'iq in 936 and the temporary abolition of the vizieral administrative system – “From this time the power of the viziers ceased” – is, for example, a short vignette, framed on both sides not by the steady breakdown of caliphal finances and the involution of the administrative system (that comes elsewhere), but by the swirl of military events succeeding the Būyid conquest of Fars.³⁴

It is therefore also not chance, at all, that Miskawayh's military history is so particular. He says little about it in the context of his analysis of events in Iraq up to 945; but when he gets to the Būyids and their Iranian rivals he recounts it with gusto and in detail. Military success is part of political legitimacy for him, so the soon-to-be-failing caliphal regime cannot be allowed to see much

³² E.g., Fähndrich, “Die Tischgespräche,” 97.

³³ Khan, *Studies*; Arkoun, *L'humanisme arabe*; see also the short but neat Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 170–6.

³⁴ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 4:394–6. For the use of Thābit, see e.g., Khan, *Studies*, 147–60. Contrast al-Šūlī in Canard, *Akhbār ar-Rāḍī billāh*, 145–7, for an account of Ibn Rā'iq's take-over which is flattened to insignificance.

of it – Mu’nis defeating the Fātimids in 920, for example, is barely reported.³⁵ But that means that, although Miskawayh’s overall historical vision is far fuller than al-Tanūkhī’s, when it comes to the affairs of Ibn al-Furāt and ‘Alī b. Ḥisā, which he recounts in at least as much detail as Hilāl or al-Tanūkhī does, he tells the same sort of stories (sometimes exactly the same stories) as either of the other two writers, and, presumably, also Thābit. Al-Muqtadir is as usual spend-thrift and capricious but essentially irrelevant; Mu’nis is more prominent but flits in and out of the narrative. But when in 917 two Byzantine envoys come to Baghdad to redeem captives, we have a long account of Ibn al-Furāt’s stage-management of the event (with the caliph silent), and it is almost the only event cited in the year, 305 AH.³⁶ Similarly, and most importantly, every time a vizier is brought down, put on trial, and subjected to *muṣādara*, Miskawayh gives us pages about what the new vizier and his henchmen said to the old one in accusation, and how he replied. These are in fact the sections where the details of good and bad administrative activity (and correct and incorrect administrative interpersonal behavior, al-Tanūkhī-style) are most clearly brought out by Miskawayh, and they may well be personal to him, rather than to Thābit. But, essentially, this framework also folds all political activity in the capital and its dependencies into administrators’ time.

As we have seen, in one crucial respect, Al-Tanūkhī and Miskawayh (as also the more shadowy Thābit, an *adīb* and physician) had a similar formation. They were involved in government, and part of an administrative system which, over all, although affected by a clearly marked change in regime to the Büyids in 945, and a perception that the new Baghdad was much poorer and less grand, and also less virtuous, than the old,³⁷ went back without any significant break to the high days of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate in the late eighth and early ninth century. This was more important for the social memory of Baghdad’s government in the minds of both al-Tanūkhī and Miskawayh than were their distinct historical projects; administrators’ time was what they had to work with. Both historians had alternative ways to structure the potentially relevant past from which to draw: law and other forms of *ilm* for al-Tanūkhī; the caliph- and war-focused narratives of al-Ṭabarī and his successors for Miskawayh. But they did not use them here. The histories of viziers and other *kuttāb* were what people talked about inside the administrative community, and so they served as the

³⁵ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 4:83. Cf. the delegitimation of the regime of early tenth-century Italy by the Ottonian loyalist historian Liutprand of Cremona through his refusal to narrate the standard signs of legitimacy for it: see Buc, “Italian Hussies.”

³⁶ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 4:56–60.

³⁷ NM, 1:5–6, 69–71, 253–4, 2137.

most resonant, the most rhetorically effective, raw material not only for the micro-moralism of al-Tanūkhī's *akhbār*, but also for the more systematic sweep of the institutional narrative of Miskawayh. That two such very different writers end up telling us the same things about Ibn al-Furāt is thus significant for the remembered world and identity of a whole social stratum.

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One question which this analysis poses is whether a pattern of this kind was inevitable. If a political system was as elaborate as this, was it not obvious that the senior administrator would be the major focus of attention for what one could call middle management? To test this, we need to look outside Iraq, to other early states with dense literary cultures, to see what administrators remembered there. I shall look at both China and the Roman empire, more briefly, from this standpoint. (Note that I do not discuss early and central medieval western Europe, my principal research expertise, as nowhere there was the state articulated enough to allow for the development of the sort of social memory under discussion here.) In China, I shall once again take the tenth century, not to pursue some imagined temporal equivalence, but simply because substantial sections of two histories, of very different types, for the period have been conveniently translated. In the case of Rome, the sixth-century east Roman writer John Lydos is the best parallel, for he wrote a partially historical account of the administration of the eastern Roman empire itself. We will start with him, and then move on to China.

The Roman empire does not have many texts written from inside its civil administrative apparatus, except for those written by some of the highly literate senators who dominated its highest offices. But these men regarded the administration as merely a lucrative, and often short, part of a life span largely devoted to *otium*, sophisticated relaxation;³⁸ senatorial texts do not, therefore, tell us about administrators' time. John Lydos (d. ca 555) is, however, an exception. From a prosperous provincial family, he entered the civil administration of the east Roman capital of Constantinople in 511, at the age of 21, and left it 40 years later, in 551–2, with the highest status position that a middle-ranking bureaucrat in the judicial section of the praetorian prefect's office could reach, the office of *cornicularius*. Shortly after this he wrote the *Peri exousiōn*, or "On Powers," which is an account of the Roman administrative system, heavily weighted towards the praetorian prefecture, which John held to be overwhelmingly the principal office in the Roman state. (It was indeed

³⁸ For *otium*, a neat characterization is in Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, 1–12.

the most important, in fact – in particular, by his time, the prefecture of the East in which he served, which covered most of the eastern Roman empire when the empire split – but it was not as dominant as John claimed, and it did not go lineally back to the dispositions of Romulus king of Rome in the eighth century BCE, as he also claimed.)³⁹ The historical past which he invoked here was highly personal, for John Lydos was bitterly opposed to the changes in the prefecture which had occurred during his career, particularly in the 530s. He expresses his opposition in the most violent terms, accusing its perpetrators of every kind of depravity. He may speak for other administrators in the judicial section of the prefecture, who seem to have been most disadvantaged by the 530s changes, but to others (including in other parts of the administration) these may well have seemed to be much-needed reforms; he only speaks for some, that is to say. In addition, he was particularly well trained, not least in Latin, in a by-now essentially Greek-speaking east Roman government, so his historical points of reference, many of which are arcane, may not all have been representative of the assumptions of others. But he has a mental trajectory of the main moments of change in the history of the administration, which, for the century before his time in particular, is internally coherent and rings true – once again, not as an account of actually occurring events (or not necessarily, at least), but as an account of how people are likely to have recalled those main moments. It is worth analyzing these, at least, in terms of administrators' time.⁴⁰

John's story is this. The fourth-century prefecture, under the emperor Constantine and his successors, was a successful and respected operation. Trouble started with the praetorian prefect Roufinos (392–5), who aimed to usurp the throne, and thus "hurled the magistracy down into a pit," for the emperor Arcadius in response took away its control over imperial arms factories, and part of the public post as well. Next, the prefect Kyros (439–41), being an Egyptian poet and not part of the Latin-speaking administrative tradition, started to write decrees in Greek: this, to John, was part of the slippery slope. Next, the emperor Leo I (457–74) squandered enormous sums of money on a failed expedition against Vandal Africa in 468, so that "the entire state was totally wrecked," by which he means that the fiscal system was trying to catch up structurally, ever after. The good emperor Anastasius (491–518) restored the public finances systematically, but was therefore necessarily avaricious, and

39 Ioannes Lydus, *On Powers*; 1:14 for Romulus.

40 The principal recent analyses of John Lydos are Caimi, *Burocrazia e diritto*; Maas, *John Lydus* (which also discusses his other works), and Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, 11–104.

thus susceptible to anyone who promised him more revenue. One of his prefects, Zotikos (511–12), was a marvelous and generous man from the same province as John; he took him into the administration, promoted him quickly in the judicial section and without the need to pay promotion fees, and found him a rich wife. But his successor Marinos (512–ca 515), from the financial section, only got the post because he promised Anastasius more taxes; he respected the prefecture, but his ill-judged reforms undermined it structurally. At least this meant that Anastasius had sufficient money to be able to appoint cultured men to succeed Marinos. But the financial situation of the prefecture (and thus of the empire) was precarious, and likely to go into crisis at any time. The emperor Justinian (527–65) was the best of all emperors, defeating the Persian invasion and reconquering barbarian-controlled North Africa and Italy; but this all cost money, which the empire was seriously short of. Hence the coming of that demon in human form, the prefect John the Cappadocian (531–2; 532–41); John Lydos constructs with detail and appalled gusto the money-grabbing, bloodthirsty, and sexually licentious horrors of his rule, province by province (beginning with Lydos' own). The wonderful Justinian had no knowledge of this; it took his wonderful wife Theodora to reveal John the Cappadocian's misdeeds to him, but even then Justinian found it hard to dislodge him. In the end, though, the people of Constantinople burned the city down in the Nika riots and the Cappadocian lost his job to the virtuous and generous Phokas (532), where the book ends (the end is in fact lost, but the contents page shows that the history of the prefecture stopped here).⁴¹

Some of this account is openly twisted for rhetorical effect: notably the role of the Nika riots in bringing down John the Cappadocian, for Phokas was only prefect for a few months before John returned – indeed, his main administrative changes postdated 532 rather than predating it, as everyone would have known. Some is factually inaccurate (the Roufinos story), which John may or may not have been aware of. The whole, dramatic, John the Cappadocian sequence is, furthermore, an anti-panegyric, a rhetorical denunciation which had its own rules, an inversion of normal panegyrical style. (Another from the same period is the denunciation by Prokopios, a military attaché with sufficient independent means for him to become a full-time historian – not a career administrator, therefore – of Justinian and Theodora themselves in the *Anekdota*, the “Secret History;” the text does not spare John the Cappadocian either, whom Prokopios certainly loathed, but it so focuses on the imperial

⁴¹ The main narrative here is Ioannes Lydus, *On Powers*, 3:39–76; with 3:26–30 for John's own career, and 2:28 for his most florid praise for Justinian. For a close analysis of this chronological sequence, see Caimi, *Burocrazia e diritto*, 211–73.

couple that John's administrative abuses were a minor element).⁴² And the changes that John Lydos so laments were largely changes which hit his own pocket, in that they had led to the end of many of the financial perquisites – fees for standard judicial acts, in particular – which the judicial sector of the administration had long regarded as a normal adjunct to their salaries. John indeed tells us that he “temperately” gained a thousand gold coins from his first year in the administration, when his patron Zotikos, like some of the vizieral patrons we have already looked at, “pointed out to me every avenue of profit.” These profits were by implication legal (and they could well have been in fact), but much of what officials expected to gain was not, and John the Cappadocian closed off both legal and illegal pathways to gain by middle-level officials, for perfectly sound financial reasons – even if he also, plausibly, enriched himself at the same time, as many administrative reformers do.⁴³ All of these are reasons not to take John Lydos's account too seriously as accurate reportage; this whole historical account is highly crafted and selective.

But, for our purposes, that is also not the point. As an exercise in shared memory, this account is also illuminating. John has an interesting take on the structural problems of the imperial fiscal system in the early sixth century, one highly unusual for Roman writers (Prokopios certainly did not have it); he must have gained that from his life in the prefecture, and his whole account (e.g., of Marinos, and even John the Cappadocian) implies that he was not the only person who thought it there. And his picture of how the players actually operated is important, too. Throughout, emperors and prefects are in a permanent agonistic relationship, with emperors very proactive in appointments, as also in wider policy, both military and fiscal, but with the praetorian prefect running the government. His account of how Justinian found it very difficult to remove John the Cappadocian cannot be taken seriously as an account of what people really believed; it is simply structurally necessary to his argument, given that Justinian is wholly good here, and John is wholly bad. (In reality, Justinian supported and furthered John's reforms, but that is even less the point).⁴⁴ But John Lydos' picture of Anastasius, highly responsive to fiscal needs, but

⁴² For John Lydos and anti-panegyric, see Caimi, *Burocrazia e diritto*, 243–4 (cf. 213–20 for Anastasius). For the rhetorical rules and their use by Prokopios, see Brubaker, “The Age of Justinian,” 433–6, commenting on Procopius, *The Anecdota* (21:5–6, 23:14 for John the Cappadocian); cf. idem, *History of the Wars*, 1:24–5, for the latter's more detailed views on John, which include some similar data to those in John Lydos.

⁴³ Ioannes Lydus, *On Powers*, 3:27 (quote); for the context, see esp. Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, 64–104.

⁴⁴ See e.g., Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 208–17.

capable of both stressing fiscal rigor and also appointing more cultured prefects when rigor was re-established, shows that emperors were very much players in his mind: not instead of prefects, but alongside them. Prefects were indeed at the apex of his day-to-day mental world, as viziers were for al-Tanūkhī, but prefects could not displace imperial centrality for him, and the real pacing of his account is reign by reign, not prefecture by prefecture. This is how administrative social memory was structured here. It can be added that, ever after, Anastasius and Justinian were also the main figures whom anyone remembered, and John the Cappadocian almost vanishes from later narratives:⁴⁵ by contrast even with Ibn al-Furāt, not to speak of the Barmakids.

So: it was indeed not necessary for rulers to be displaced by chief administrators in the memories of their subordinates; administrators' time might marginalize Arab caliphs, but it could at least partially privilege Roman emperors too. Let us look at one more example before we try to generalize here, for the Chinese example makes an even stronger point than the one just made, with the added advantage that the Chinese administration is also very well documented indeed.

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China certainly had administrators' time. The dozens of volumes of official Chinese history-writing for major dynasties like the Song (960–1279) were, in Étienne Balazs's words, “écrite *par des fonctionnaires pour des fonctionnaires*.”⁴⁶ Their density is extraordinary and without parallel in the medieval world. Daily or near-daily Diaries of Activity and Repose, of each emperor, were summarized at the end of the year as chronological Daily Calendars, and then again summarized, with the addition of more official documents, as a Veritable Record, after each reign. Either then or later, biographies of leading officials (civil and military), constructed after their deaths on the basis of their personnel files, were added, and the resultant collection, of annals and biographies, was turned into a National History, together with monographical works on important issues of value to future administrators. The whole set of narratives was then kept as an archive and made available to the next dynasty, when, at the outset, historian-officials from the previous dynasty would be employed to create a Standard History from all of them (but particularly the last-named), which would then stand as the “objective” version of the history of that dynasty.

⁴⁵ As with the marginal attention given to John in either of *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, 288, or the *Chronicon Paschale*, 116.

⁴⁶ Balazs, “L'*histoire* comme guide de la pratique bureaucratique,” 82 (author's italics).

for the future. This was a near-universal pattern for the whole period from the Tang dynasty (618–907) to the 1920s recording of the Standard History of the Qing dynasty. All the Standard Histories survive; rather less of the others, particularly the Diaries and Daily Calendars, and effectively nothing for our period.⁴⁷ To their number must be added private histories, usually by major political figures at court, such as the *Xin Wudai shi* or “New History of the Five Dynasties” of Ouyang Xiu (d. 1072), which was sufficiently highly regarded – Ouyang was also a famous poet and literary stylist – to be added, uniquely for a private compilation, to the set of Standard Histories shortly after his death; or the huge *Zizhi tongjian* of Sima Guang (d. 1086), a major political theorist, which covered the whole period from 403 BCE to 960 CE, and was mined for its insights ever after. These private histories were not the work of teams of historians, in contrast to the official ones (although Sima Guang certainly had research assistants – we even know some of their names). They speak the minds of single authors. Sima’s instructions to his assistants for how to do the work have survived.⁴⁸ But they – Ouyang in particular – have a similar structure to the official compilations, although adding very personal and moralized versions of the Standard History commentaries on events, as we shall see in a moment.

The audience of these texts was, as Etienne Balazs said, above all other administrators, and often emperors too; their “objectivity” was the “common sense,” in the Gramscian sense, of the scholar-bureaucrat stratum which governed China. The genealogical relationship of the Standard Histories to the usually lost, but highly contemporary, Diaries was so tight that most modern historians are even today amazingly respectful of their truth-content; their narrative strategies have rarely, until very recently, been analyzed or critiqued at all.⁴⁹ All the same, if we simply take them as accounts (whether true or false) of the agreed past as relevant to administrators, along the lines we have been

⁴⁷ See in general Yang, “The Organization of Chinese Official Historiography”; Twitchett, “Chinese Biographical Writing”; Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History Under the Tang*; Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*; Hartman and DeBlasi, “The Growth of Historical Method”; Hartman, “Chinese Historiography.”

⁴⁸ For Ouyang, see below, n. 51. For the text of Sima’s instructions, Pulleyblank, “Chinese Historical Criticism,” 160–4.

⁴⁹ Recent exceptions for our period include Levine, *Divided by a Common Language*, and Tillman, “Textual Liberties.” See also Standen, “Who Wants To Be an Emperor?,” for an against-the-grain analysis. A marker of the relative novelty of this approach is the worry shown in 2005 by Xiao-bin Ji in his excellent study *Politics and Conservatism*, 8–9, about the idea, argued by Tillman (with a caution which is in itself telling), that Sima Guang might have invented some of his historical facts.

looking at for Iraqi texts and for John Lydos, we cannot deny their notable solidity and homogeneity.

The monographs contained in such histories, and developed in free-standing encyclopedias, were of all types: they covered astrology, rituals and music, geography, law, administration, and statecraft. They covered, that is to say, much the same range as Arabic *adab*, and had the same function: to train elegantly educated bureaucrats. And in China that training was even more explicitly formulated, for such wider knowledge was based on classical Confucian history and philosophy, poetry, and calligraphy (their equivalents all also part of *adab*), which were the raw material of the imperial examination system, that partially meritocratic process which controlled entry into the official strata by the Tang and was perfected under the Song. Under the Song, politics was dominated by such scholar-bureaucrats; under the Tang, a military aristocracy had been more important. But even under the Tang, the homogeneity of the civil administration, which was needed to actually run the empire, was already great, and military figures were no more powerful than under the Roman empire, the caliphate or the Büyids, where a very large space was left for administrative culture, as we have seen. The administration had its own well-defined hierarchy, which ran up to one or more chief councilors, whose vizier-like powers could be considerable, not least in the eleventh century, the age of Ouyang and Sima (both of them reached the office of vice chief councilor, Ouyang in 1061–7 and Sima in 1085–6, and the latter senior chief councilor briefly in 1086).⁵⁰ All of this thus offers strong cultural and institutional parallels with the tenth-century caliphate. But administrators' time was rather different all the same, as we shall see.

Ouyang Xiu's history of the Five Dynasties has been translated in large part by Richard Davis, and can stand for others here.⁵¹ The "Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms" period (907–60 for the former, 902–79 for the latter) was a notably unstable one, the period of greatest disunity in Chinese history between the reunification of 581 and the 1920s. China then consisted of around ten separate polities: the long-lived Liao dynasty (907–1125) in the northern part of the North China Plain and large parts of Manchuria and Mongolia; a relatively large single state ruled by five short-lived regimes in the southern part, stretching out from the old imperial capital (the "Five Dynasties" – this was the

⁵⁰ See e.g., Schäfer, "Die Legitimation der Beamten," for hierarchies and useful lists of office-holders; for the careers of Ouyang and Sima, see Liu, *Ou-yang Hsiu*, and Ji, *Politics and Conservatism*.

⁵¹ Ouyang Xiu, *Historical Records*, cited henceforth as *xwds* with the chapter (which is the same in the translation as the original) and the page of the translation.

area which the Song founder took over in 960); and then half a dozen smaller states at any one time in the rice lands of southern China, plus one on the borders of Liao power (the “Ten Kingdoms” – the Song had conquered all these by 979). Its internal history was very complicated indeed.⁵² Ouyang deals with this (as did other historians) by only treating the Five Dynasties as legitimate, and thus concentrating the annalistic part of his narrative on a single succession of states; the rulers of the Ten Kingdoms only appear in his biographical section, and he dismissed the Liao, whose Kitan rulers were of Turco-Mongol origin, into an appendix of assorted barbarians. The picture he paints is highly complex all the same, especially in his long list of biographies.

An administrative career in the Five Dynasties period either was going to be short (each dynasty lasted an average of eleven years) or would overlap across several dynasties. Unsurprisingly, civil administrators tended to choose the latter, if they could – above all, if they were not too close to the politics of the outgoing regime. During the time of the Five Dynasties, this seems to have been regarded as normal, although there was clearly an etiquette (at least in the eyes of other bureaucrats) as to how one should transfer loyalty (*zhong*): preferably not too quickly, and preferably offering oneself without fear to the mercies of the new ruler – i.e., preferably by taking risks in order to preserve one's honor. Under the Song, however, a stable dynasty for a long time, *zhong* came to be seen more absolutely, at least by political players. At the start of the dynasty, the Song were very content to accept the loyalty of men of the previous Later Zhou regime (951–60), which was also the only one of the Five Dynasties to have a good later reputation. Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang, however, a century later, both went out of their way to criticize administrators (and, indeed, military figures) who transferred loyalty to a new dynasty.⁵³ Ouyang's text intersperses superficially neutral accounts of imperial and official careers with sections called “We lament” or “Alas” (*wuhu*), which are, indeed, laments against the immorality and dreadfulness of the times, as when he tells us that not one single moral servant of the Tang dynasty survived its fall in 907, and

⁵² See in general, recently, the articles by Naomi Standen and Hugh R. Clark in *The Cambridge History of China*, 5.i:38–205 (this book is now also the basic reference work for the political history of the Song dynasty; note that the *Cambridge History* series is one of the last current works still to use the old Wade-Giles romanization of Chinese, rather than the *pinyin* system used in China); Lorge, *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms*; Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, which takes an interpretative approach focused on Liao–Five Dynasty relations. Many of the separate states have their own monographs, of varying value; a good recent one is Hongjie Wang, *Power and Politics*, on the Former Shu dynasty.

⁵³ See esp. Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, 41–63.

only “mediocre cowards . . . men of sinister cunning” persisted to serve the next regimes.⁵⁴

A key example of this, much-quoted in both traditional and recent scholarship, concerns the administrator Feng Dao (d. 954), who managed to serve five separate dynasties, including the Liao, and also wrote (unusually) a somewhat complacent autobiographical account of it. Ouyang Xiu, seizing on the latter, says he was “a man utterly devoid of integrity and shame;” Sima Guang saw him as unworthy, disloyal, and “like an innkeeper watching travellers [i.e., the emperors] pass by;” a loyal (*zhong*) minister should only serve one ruler, just as a widow should not remarry. Actually, Feng Dao, in the accounts of his life, does seem to have performed the changeovers with correctness and often bravery – and success, much praised at the time; and even Ouyang does not stint his description of his frugality, humility, and generosity to the poor. Conversely, it is also the case that Feng’s case is much-quoted above all because this is the main place where Ouyang and Sima really let rip rhetorically, quotably, about perfidy; elsewhere, Ouyang at least is rather more implicit, or else more generically condemning. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Feng Dao was held up in this way precisely because he had been remembered as dealing, as correctly as he could, with the situation in which he found himself – a situation which in general later writers wished to condemn. If even he was devoid of integrity, all the others were worse.⁵⁵ Either way, however, the Five Dynasties period was not a good time for loyalty in the eyes of later generations.

Under the caliphate and its successors, one common form of historiography was the collective biography of members of the ‘*ulamā*’, often of a specific city, and this sort of narrative had particularly little to do with rulership or administrators: partly because the religious/legal establishment was for the most part (except near capitals) socially separate from the military men and career bureaucrats who ran the state, partly because biographies of single people understandably concentrate on their own lives, not that of those who

54 *XWDS*, 35:287.

55 *XWDS*, 54:438–43 (with comment by Davis, *ibid.*, lxxi–iii); Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, 59–61 (with the Sima quotes); Levine, *Divided by a Common Language*, 53–4; Ji, *Politics and Conservatism*, 47–8; earlier, see above all Wang Gung-wu, “Feng Tao,” the fullest account of his career, which defends him as a man of his times, notwithstanding the “mediocrity of his life and thought,” 138. Note that Feng Dao (*XWDS*, 54:442–3) is also said to have advised Shizong of the Later Zhou not to begin to conquer his neighbors, which was later regarded as the necessary precursor to Song reunification; this will not have helped his later reputation at all (contrast Wang Pu, discussed below). Ouyang Xiu is much less harsh about other similar cases; for an example, see below, n. 61.

ruled over them.⁵⁶ The biographies in Chinese official histories are similar in the latter respect, but not in the former. The people concerned were anyway selected by historians because they were close to power, rather than as experts in a specifically religious knowledge (a category of people which was usually politically marginal in China). But it is also the case that, if one reads the biographies in Ouyang Xiu's *Xin Wudai shi*, emperors crop up all the time as players in these people's lives. So do other administrators, and generals, as patrons and rivals; but emperors are a constant, and, despite a constant enumeration of different official titles, the inner workings of the administrative hierarchy are barely present, unlike in the Arabic narratives we have looked at hitherto – a point we shall come back to. Emperors were not all strong, of course, and also not always in the capital; senior administrators could find themselves able to exercise very considerable independent power as a result. But this is always depicted as exceptional, and also as potentially both bad and unstable. An emperor too much in thrall to his officials will fall (as supposedly happened with the decline of the Tang, as also, much later, the Southern Song in the late thirteenth century). And in the end a sensible emperor will tire of an overmighty official and bring him down, as the emperor Mingzong (926–33) of the Later Tang did with the chief councilor An Chonghui, executed in 931.⁵⁷ Officials could rise and fall, going in and out of favor (this would be particularly common under the Song in the eleventh century), with a revolving door reminiscent of Baghdad in the early tenth, but this was seen as relying, above all, on not just imperial favor, but imperial policy-making too.

Ouyang Xiu makes this point particularly explicit when he writes about Wang Pu (d. 959), who wrote a famous memorial to the Later Zhou emperor Shizong (954–9) giving advice about how to conquer other states, and, while Shizong was off doing precisely that, ran the capital (and reformed court music) with great, much-praised, skill. Wang Pu had been with Shizong for a long time, so passed Ouyang's loyalty test. The historian, however, when editorializing, does not only praise him; he was very capable, but what could he have done without Shizong? "We should scarcely assume that all were stupid and spineless under Jin and Han rule [936–51], whereas all were able and astute under the Zhou."⁵⁸ That is to say, despite Ouyang's strictures on the personal failings involved in disloyalty, when it comes to global failure or success, this is the work of the

⁵⁶ For surveys, see Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 187–208; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 66–74 (note that not all such biographical collections restricted themselves to '*ulamā'*'); for a case study, Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*.

⁵⁷ *XWDS*, 24:219–26.

⁵⁸ *XWDS*, 31:258–61, 264 (quote).

ruler, not his officials. This assumption structured the imagery of the Chinese administration as a whole. Indeed, every time administrators make rhetorical reference to the (often far-off) past in their memorials to emperors, this is what comes out too: the Han emperors (202 BCE–220 CE) were particularly favored points of reference, but these then ran back into mythical times as well. The emperor was at the top of the administrative hierarchy in China, distinct from it but complementary to it, and administrators therefore remembered emperors too, as part of the process of remembering themselves.

We can see why this should be particularly the case in the minds of Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang, contemporaries and rivals in the Song imperial court. In the daily practice of administration in China, for them as for others, emperors were much more the focus of attention than caliphs were in Iraq, and more even than emperors were in the later Roman empire. A standard way for lower level administrators to come to the attention of political players was to send a memorial to the emperor about some aspect of public policy, memorials which, indeed, emperors sometimes read. It was also not only normal for bureaucrats to criticize imperial policy choices (Ouyang and Sima did so regularly), but actually enshrined in administrative offices, the Censorate and the Remonstrance Bureau (even if the officials who ran them often found themselves in uncomfortable situations). Sima was a fierce opponent of the administrative reforms of the emperor Shenzong (1067–85), but he was also a close ally and confidant of the emperor, who valued his opinion, however critical. There is also more documentation of open debate in these courts than in any western court known to me, and the emperor held the ring as the perfect and single audience and judge. (Shenzong even read Ouyang's "We lament" passages in the *Xin Wudai shi*; his esteem for them is one of the reasons why the book became accepted among the Standard Histories.)⁵⁹ Ouyang and Sima were both highly committed to imperial activism in their personal politics, too; earlier, Sima had worked hard to try to persuade the mentally ill emperor Yingzong (1063–7) to come back into public life as a proper political player.⁶⁰

59 See for this detail Lamouroux, "Entre symptôme et précédent," 62; this whole article is the best guide to Ouyang's political beliefs. Shenzong was not uncritical of the "We lament" passages, all the same: cf. Hartman, "Chinese Historiography," 46. For debate before the emperor, see a detailed example from 1070, written by a contemporary, Fan Zuyu, in his *Dixue*, trans. in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 1:631–4.

60 See Ji, *Politics and Conservatism*, 83–9, who is a good guide (131–64) to Shenzong's relation to Sima as well. Note that Sariti, "Monarchy, Bureaucracy," argues the opposite, that Sima believed that the emperor should just be an arbiter, and leave bureaucrats to govern; Ji, *Politics and Conservatism*, 14, 42, and Levine, *Divided by a Common Language*, 58–9, both

So of course imperial activism would have been at the center of their image of the past, in both ideal and less ideal times.

This, however, presents a potential problem. We are dealing here with two historians ideologically committed to imperial protagonism. And the official sources which both of them relied on would have in themselves made that protagonism, real or imagined, hard to circumvent. This overdetermination might make what administrative *memory* actually consisted of here harder to identify. What we lack, so far, is an al-Tanūkhī or a John Lydos, whose much more informal narratives of the past, based in part on oral accounts, might tell us what social groups remembered and talked about among themselves, rather than about the proper rhetoric to present to emperors, and the patterning of formal historiography, however strong these were (including however strong an effect that historiography had on the way in which administrators really did pattern their memories). A recent analysis and partial translation by Glen Dudbridge of the memoirs of Wang Renyu, an older contemporary of al-Tanūkhī, will help to fill the gap here, and a look at these will close this brief China section.

Wang Renyu (d. 956) was a classic example of the sort of administrator whose skillful moves between Five Dynasties regimes Ouyang Xiu particularly disliked. (Ouyang does not devote much space to his biography, however, and his moralism is here not notably visible at all.)⁶¹ He was employed by the Former Shu in modern Sichuan, one of the Ten Kingdoms, until its destruction in 925, and then had the sort of seamless career across four of the Five Dynasties that Feng Dao had: this is all recorded in an epitaph on stone, still surviving beside his tomb, written by Li Fang (d. 996), an academic client of his, who became a senior official under the early Song. That epitaph, unusually long, only recounts one moment of difficulty, when Wang supported the opponents of the usurping last emperor of the Later Tang, Modi (934–6, an emperor whose legitimacy Wang did not recognize, as his use of titles in his own work shows), and was brave in front of the new emperor, saying that he was happy to face death. (It is likely that 925 and also 947, the fall of the Later Jin, were equally dangerous, but neither Li nor Wang himself tell us so.) Apart from that, he steadily rose up the hierarchy, as dynasties came and went, and held very senior offices by the time of his retirement in the early 950s. He was also a well-known poet and littérateur, although most of his work has been

convincingly counter this position. The latter book, esp. 42–61, is the best guide to the workings and discourse of factions in the eleventh-century bureaucracy.

⁶¹ I am here grateful to Naomi Standen, who checked the original (not translated by Davis) for me, Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Wudai shi*, 57:661–2.

lost. Li Fang, however, preserved much of two of his more occasional works in the large compendium of literature whose compilation Li supervised in the early Song period, the *Taiping guangji*.⁶²

The main one of Wang Renyu's works which partially survives in this way is the *Yu tang xian hua*, much of which seems on internal grounds to have been written in the 940s. The title is loosely translated by Dudbridge as "Table Talk from the Hanlin Academy," the high-ranking scholarly community which furnished numerous senior bureaucrats; it is interesting that Dudbridge spontaneously chose the phrase "table talk," which as we have seen was also used by David Margoliouth to render the meaning of al-Tanūkhī's *Nishwār al-muhādara*. As is implied above, the text only survives in fragments (to be precise, 181 separate narratives), so we only have the evidence of the internal ordering of each narrative, not any wider structure, and we cannot be absolutely certain how representative they are; all the same, they are fairly cohesive in their subject matter. They consist of *exempla*, both long and very short, each intended to be interesting or amusing, but with moral messages, which are in many (but not all) cases explicit. These concern high politics, military campaigns, dreams and other omens, healing, natural marvels (many of them witnessed by Wang himself), supernatural events, and folktales. They therefore do not by any means restrict themselves to the politically powerful, as in Ouyang Xiu, although the latter's biographies are often enough exemplary in parallel ways; and when they do they often restrict themselves to a single anecdote of defiance, wit, shaming, or prescience.⁶³ All this is not at all unlike al-Tanūkhī, notwithstanding the necessary contrasts between him and Wang Renyu, owing to differences between cultures and narrative strategies which had relatively few points of contact. So is the intercutting between high

62 The epitaph is translated in Dudbridge "The Rhetoric of Loyalty and Disloyalty," 170–9, and now in idem, *A Portrait of Five Dynasties China*, 192–9; ibid., 3–4, 8–32 for Wang's life. I am very grateful to Glen Dudbridge and to OUP for letting me see and cite this text before publication. Compare the similar but sometimes shorter epitaphs, from the next two generations, translated by Stahl, "Grabschriften," 39–61.

63 Some 40% of the *Yu tang xian hua*, in the summary form in which it survives, is translated by Dudbridge in *A Portrait of Five Dynasties China*, and he provides a complete register and abstract of all the individual narratives, with full reference to the originals, at the end of the book. Here, these will be cited as *YTXH*, with the number of the narrative as assigned by Dudbridge, and with page references when there is also a full translation, as there is for most of the narratives used here. Nos. 183–214 in fact come from a separate work, the *Wang shi jian wen lu*, "Things Seen and Heard by Wang;" this was either shorter or taken less seriously by Li Fang's team, but its contents are of exactly the same type, and I will subsume it here under the longer work.

politics and folklore. It is the high politics which interests us here, nonetheless; for this set of accounts was, very much, not “official history,” and not ordered in any way which resembles the Chinese writings mentioned in the foregoing, even though Wang had a similar training to Ouyang and Sima, and reached similarly high positions in the government. But it is very likely that it does tell us about social memory; many of the eyewitness accounts are Wang’s own personal memories; many of them are explicitly oral accounts, told to him or to his informants; these were the sort of narratives which, although finely honed in the telling and writing, he could indeed have exchanged with his colleagues in the social web of administrators’ time. This is confirmed by a telling quote which may well have served as an introduction to the work: “When not taken up with their official duties, academicians all tell of things they have seen and heard in the course of their life.”⁶⁴

What Wang Renyu has to tell in that context is as personal as is al-Tanūkhī, and often relates to the middle men of the administrative hierarchy, as also to middle-ranking military men, of his own times and going back into the last days of the Tang. One instance is an account in which the Former Shu general Wang Hui (who told the story to one of Wang Renyu’s friends) was besieged in a fortress and dreamed that there was a spring of water under the jail inside it, which turned out to be true, thus saving the defenders; another describes how the same Wang Hui was dissuaded from his plan to kill his successful rivals at court and then commit suicide by a diviner who read his plan in his face and told him of his future career posts, all of which he gained; another relates to Dou Mengzheng (d. 931), a Hanlin Scholar who lost his position at the Later Liang court around 920, but dreamed that he would get it back – but the dream warned him that he would suffer badly if he ever accepted a senior administrative role, which indeed happened, in 930–1, for he died soon after his promotion. Dreams and other omens are prominent here, but so are more naturalistic accounts, as when two military men discussed in 926 whether it was sensible to accompany the designated heir of the emperor Zhuangzong of the Later Tang to the capital now that the latter had been replaced by a usurper, Mingzong; maybe it would be best to dissuade him? But the senior officer had had a solemn request from Zhuangzong and carried through his order, with the result that the heir was killed. These sorts of account would never have got into a Standard History; they were too supernatural, and/or dealt with minor

64 Dudbridge, *A Portrait of Five Dynasties China*, 4. This phrase does not survive in the *Taiping guangji*, but in a later related compilation, the *Leishuo* of 1136, attached to Wang Renyu’s name and some of the *YTXH* narratives; but it is an illuminating one no matter from where it derives.

people. But even when they could have, there were differences. For example, Zhang Jun, a career bureaucrat temporarily in charge of a Tang army in retreat in 890, had to get through a prefecture whose prefect was subject to Wang Ke, a general of uncertain loyalty. Zhang greeted the prefect in advance of the army and invited him to tea, wine, and then a meal, for many hours, but never speaking to him. Wang Ke, a suspicious man, subsequently asked the prefect what they had talked about; the prefect replied, absolutely nothing; Wang Ke thought that this was insincere and had him killed; Zhang got his army through without trouble as a result. Ouyang Xiu could have told this story, for Zhang became a prominent figure in the next decade; this sort of account of a clever stratagem was not only part of the common currency of administrators' talking, but might have been formally recorded. But Ouyang would have inserted it into Zhang's career as part of a longer chronological account. Wang Renyu, by contrast, concentrates on the stratagem.⁶⁵

Emperors are much more prominent in Wang Renyu than caliphs had been in al-Tanūkhī. They too have dreams or respond to omens, as when Shi Jingtang, the future emperor Gaozu, founder of the Later Jin dynasty, dreamed in 936 (shortly before his revolt) that the current emperor asked him into the palace and made way for him, or when his son Chudi (942–7), the last emperor of the same dynasty, dreamed in 945 of a treasure in jade and asked the Hanlin Scholars (including Wang himself) to interpret it, which they did in a favorable way, while believing the opposite. Emperors also appear interacting with scholar-bureaucrats, who sometimes take the opportunity to show their wit, to their own glory and sometimes at the expense of others, but sometimes simply deal with the ruler in a principled way. Wang recounts occasional stories from his own personal experience here, as in his very long (and highly worked-up) account of the disastrous visit by Wang Yin, last emperor of the Former Shu, to an outlying prefecture in 925, against which he was warned in a long memorial from a leading minister which Wang Renyu preserves, and during which the emperor and Wang swapped poems (Wang's with veiled warnings), before they discovered that the empire had been invaded in the war which destroyed Shu's independence.⁶⁶

A shorter but equally significant instance is an account of Feng Juan, an elderly scholar of the Tang dynasty, who was in Sichuan before Wang Jian, the governor there, established himself as first emperor of the Former Shu in 907. When Feng learned of his plans to revolt, he refused to serve him any more (he accepted the governor's gifts, but locked them in a cupboard marked

65 Respectively, *YTXH*, 30:51–2, 4:70–1, 25:72–3, 184:55, 41:46–7.

66 Respectively, *YTXH*, 15:25, 85:70, 194:124–43.

"bribes"), but Wang Jian then needed an official letter to write to another court in the North, and no drafts were satisfactory, until they asked Feng to write it, which he did perfectly. Feng still refused high office after 907, but he and the Shu emperor remained on good terms thereafter. The striking feature of this story is that its key element exactly matches two accounts in al-Tanūkhī, as we have seen; to be the only person who can draft an official letter properly was a trope common to both cultures. Indeed, Li Fang related the same story about Wang Renyu himself when he confronted the emperor Modi of the Later Tang in 934.⁶⁷ But the imperial interaction which underlies it is relatively rare in al-Tanūkhī, whereas it is normal in Wang Renyu. Wang does not seem to have identified strongly with any of the various dynasties he served (except perhaps the Later Han, 947–51), and his memorials tended to fall on deaf ears, at least according to Li Fang in his epitaph ("in vain was his mind full of plans for high national policy . . . it was the misfortune of his times"), but the emperor and his court were nonetheless a key point of reference for him.⁶⁸ This backs up the picture drawn by Ouyang Xiu and the tradition of official history, and locates it more securely in the framework of administrators' time in China; when "academicians all tell of things they have seen and heard," emperors figured prominently among the stories.

Conversely, the striking absence in Wang Renyu's narratives, even more than those of Ouyang, is life inside the administrative hierarchy itself. We have already seen vignettes of administrators, and there are plenty of others, such as the account of Feng Xiu (d. 837), whom everyone expected to become a senior minister, and who was already celebrating his promotion, when the finalized list was published without his name on it, for the Tang emperor had taken it out at the last moment – he died of the shock.⁶⁹ But what we get very little of is the sort of story common in both Arabic and Roman sources, and very common indeed in al-Tanūkhī, of the world of administrative back-biting, of rising and falling in the administrative hierarchy through patronage or jealousy, of maneuverings around ministers temporarily out of favor, or of the etiquette

67 *YTXH*, 197:106–8; Dudbridge, *A Portrait of Five Dynasties China*, 23, 195. Is it actually a real international folk motif, then, available for oral accounts wherever there was a literate hierarchy to attach itself to? Although it is not in Thompson, *MotifIndex*, it could well be; but the motif also does not appear in the Roman or Byzantine world, nor in central medieval western Europe. My thanks here to Christopher Kelly, Leslie Brubaker, Paul Magdalino, and John Sabapathy for their thoughts.

68 Dudbridge, *A Portrait of Five Dynasties China*, 198, 32–3, for the epitaph quote and commentary, with 165:30 for the Later Han (the only dynasty Wang is warm about).

69 *YTXH*, 158.

of “corruption” – of, in general, the muddy complexity of day-to-day moral and not-so-moral choices in the world of government. Loyalty is prominent in Wang Renyu, almost as much as it is in Ouyang Xiu; this was a public virtue, then, even in the difficult times of the Five Dynasties, whatever later writers thought.⁷⁰ But official “corruption,” although it is not absent from Wang (as also not from Ouyang, who in fact gives us more insights into administrative jealousy than Wang does), is not narrativized. It is both bad and normal, but its daily attractiveness is not allowed into the realms of the spoken/written, unlike in Arabic sources. (Roman sources are halfway between the two here, for official “corruption” is very frequently inveighed against in them, and was on everyone’s mind, but is almost never something which anyone would have admitted they did themselves.)⁷¹ Above all, “corruption” in China is not amusing, unlike quite often in al-Tanūkhī.

I am reminded of the difference between modern Britain and Italy here. It is not quite as clear as people believe (or believed until recently) that Italy is substantially more corrupt than Britain, but what is very evident is that Italians retell corruption and inappropriate-patronage stories with frequency and gusto, whereas the British do not, except in extreme situations – they are too serious for “mere” gossip. It is as if there is a significant aporia here, in Britain now and China then: that the accepted fabric of appropriate behavior risks being rent irreparably if corrupt behavior is legitimized by talking about it as if it were normal. If it was part of the individual memory of administrators in China (which it must have been), it was not part of *social* memory, of administrators’ time, if people did not tell stories about it. That does seem to me a significant difference, if one wants to compare China and Iraq, with the Roman empire between them, in the centuries discussed here.

Chinese administrators’ time in our period thus seems to have remembered, not a hierarchy of fallible humans under the vizier or praetorian prefect, with people climbing up it by fair means or foul, but a *system*, into which people fitted, and behaved well or less well as individuals in the different offices which they held at different times. It is interesting here that, in strong contrast to both the caliphate and the Roman empire, it is seldom easy to be sure who is chief councilor at any given moment in these narratives. The Chinese court

⁷⁰ Dudbridge, “The Rhetoric of Loyalty and Disloyalty”; see further n. 53 above.

⁷¹ A heavily moralized guide to this is MacMullen, *Corruption*, esp. 122–70, on the Roman empire into the fifth century; 133–4 and 161 give rare examples of people half-admitting their own involvement in buying advantage (as they would have put it) rather than attacking others for it. (It should be remembered on the other hand that freely given patronage was regarded as normal and praiseworthy in all three of the states analyzed here.)

had many senior players, and they all normally had access to the emperor; the highest position of all was just another office, with a set of powers attached which are manipulated for good or bad in ways appropriate to that office, greater than those of others but not typologically different. This further fits with why the emperor is so stressed in the Chinese version of administrators' time, at least in the tenth and eleventh centuries: because there was not a head of the administrative hierarchy itself who is all that visible as such at all.

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We now have three alternative versions of administrative social memory to set against each other, a process already begun in the last few paragraphs. Administrators' time remembered jealousy and resentment in all three (and, doubtless, in every other administrative structure, and every academic institution for that matter, in human history). It also stressed and respected true professionalism in all three, as befits three of the most successful pre-modern states in history. The density of administrative memory in all three furthermore shows how much there actually was to remember (whether true or false); the complex alleyways of the administration of early medieval states produced a consciousness of a community, a collective identity, among officials in each which does indeed deserve our attention, and there is often enough data available for us to be able to study it in considerable detail. To show that is one of the major aims of this article. But the other aim is comparative, the study and explanation of differences. Social memory gave most space to the detail of corrupt behavior, out of these three cases, in the caliphate, although the Roman view of the past also tended to attach the label of "corruption" to every political enemy; China is here the major exception, and I have already offered some tentative comments on the subject. Only under the caliphate did administrators' time ignore the army and military events – even John Lydos, who would have had an excuse not to mention them given his subject matter, stresses the Persian wars, and in China there is a constant intermingling between military and civil events in our two histories, which is only partially explained by the large space for war necessary in a post-Tang world which up to 960/979 consisted of ten separate polities. The caliphate is here the exception, and this underlines the unusual separation between the administrative and military communities – in career-structure and in social origin – in that society, by the time of the Būyids at least, even if not before.⁷² But what also stands out is the different attention paid in each version of administrators' time to the head of

⁷² As is made clear by the data in e.g., Mottahadeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*.

state, caliph or emperor, and the head of the administration: in tenth-century Iraq, the vizier is fronted above all, and rulers, both caliphs and their successors, are much less stressed; in the later Roman empire the praetorian prefect is very important, but in a resolutely emperor-centered framework; and in China the emperor is the real center and the chief councilor is not. Both of the two extremes here need comment; but in a book focused on the Islamic world I will end with the caliphate.

Patricia Crone has argued, more clearly than anyone, that it was in the ‘Abbāsid period that caliphs lost their role as religious and doctrinal leaders.⁷³ The Umayyad caliphs had had a strong sense of their religious responsibilities (notwithstanding their later *damnatio memoriae* as irredeemably secular), but after 750 the *‘ulamā’* took on that role more and more exclusively; the *mihna*, the “inquisition” of 833–47 over the correct understanding of the created nature of the Qur'an, was the last moment in which the caliph attempted to impose a doctrinal viewpoint, and it failed; thereafter, the caliphs and (still more) their successors for the most part left *‘ilm* to the *‘ulamā’*, and restricted themselves to the secular sphere. *‘Ulamā’* memory after that did not extend very greatly to caliphs, except with regard to the perennial debates about the legitimacy of the first five successors to Muhammad; so individual caliphs (as opposed to the principle of the caliphate) could get forgotten in *‘ilm*, and indeed, by our period, already were to quite a substantial extent.⁷⁴ This was broadly true of *adab* as well, which mostly did not need to concentrate on rulers at all, except in the arenas where rulers could be direct patrons (and indeed, in the case of poetry in particular, participants); so much was written by intellectual elites in ninth- to eleventh-century Iraq that no ruler could even have known about it all,⁷⁵ and both writing and readership was by now the work of quite restricted circles of experts in each field of knowledge. But what I think my argument shows is that this is even true of the civil administration, which might have been expected to look to rulers most systematically. Where rulers remained crucial points of reference was above all with respect to armies, and their place in histories was made safe by their military role; but as heads of an administrative machine they were marginalized, unless they were unusually proactive.

The fall of the Sasanian empire was memorialized elegiacally by elites and became part of folklore, to be crystallized in al-Tanūkhī's and Miskawayh's own

73 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 130–3; Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 24–57, 80–99.

74 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 224–47.

75 As shown, above all, in Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*.

lifetimes in that core Persian literary text, the *Shahnameh*.⁷⁶ The fall of the (western) Roman empire was harder to pin down in its date, so there was not a single tragic event for succeeding generations to focus on, but every successor regime had to deal in one way or other with the encumbering weight and (often) the nostalgia of the remembered Roman past, and the continuing force of the King Arthur narratives, among others from that “heroic age,” attests to the momentousness felt to be attached to the period of change. Every Chinese dynasty in history had the reasons for its eventual failure discussed and moralized about, even if less often with regret (Ouyang Xiu on the Tang is here an exception), in the records of the Standard Histories and in the image-making of the succeeding regime. But the fall of the ‘Abbāsids and, later, the Büyids, was not recalled in the same way, except in the attempts by people such as Miskawayh (and, later, Ibn Khaldūn) to explain failure structurally, and in the vaguer sense of loss that one finds in al-Tanūkhī. A major reason was that the dense literary cultures of the caliphal heartlands were not thinking very often about who ruled them. When the caliphs lost control even of administrators’ time, they lost control of the memory of the literate strata who might have lamented the passing of their power.

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76 Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*, esp. 810–54.

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An Eleventh-Century Justification of the Authority of Twelver Shiite Jurists

Devin J. Stewart

Patricia Crone's *God's Rule* addresses the topic of legitimate government in the first six centuries of Islamic history from the perspectives of the Zaydī, Imāmī, and Ismā'īlī Shiites, the Kharrijites, the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs, Mu'tazili and Ash'arī theologians, and the Party of Hadith, making it the most comprehensive study of the Imamate to date. The work is also important for its insights into Islamic religious authority in general, and not just the political variety, for it clarifies a point that often remains muddled in other studies: namely, that various groups have laid claim to religious authority in the course of Islamic history, including caliphs, sultans, theologians, jurists, and hadith scholars, and that these groups, far from coexisting in harmony, have perpetually been in potential, if not always real, conflict. While Crone does not make this conflict of authorities the framework of *God's Rule*, its chapters provide ample evidence of the contests between competing groups and the historical shifts they have undergone, as well as the resolutions and compromises that they reached. A particularly interesting case is that of the Imāmī or Twelver Shiites, whose tradition presents a historical problem with regard to religious authority, which passed, historically, from their Imams to Twelver Shiite jurists. Crone addresses this issue with insight, noting in particular a theory of delegation (*tafwīd*) presented by al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022), a leading scholar of the Twelver Shiites living under Buwayhid rule in Iraq (945–1055), to justify the jurists' authority. The key texts for this delegation are al-Mufid's discussion of the execution of the prescribed punishments (*hudūd*) in his legal manual *al-Muqni'a* and a similar discussion, based on that of al-Mufid, by al-Shaykh al-Tūsī (d. 460/1067) in his legal manual *al-Nihāya*.¹ The following

¹ Patricia Crone, *God's Rule*, 243, 290, 292–3, 295–6, 300, 303. This usage of the technical term *tafwīd* is to be distinguished from another important usage in Shiite theology to denote the doctrine – viewed as heretical by scholars such as al-Mufid – that while the Imams are not divine, God delegated to them His powers to create the world, all that is in it, and all acts. McDermott, *Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufid*, 114. The few studies that have commented on al-Mufid's theory of legal delegation, to the best of my knowledge, are Moussavi, *Religious*

remarks examine another justification for the jurists' authority by Abū al-Fath al-Karājīkī (d. 449/1057), a student of al-Mufid.

Defining religious authority and addressing attendant questions of orthodoxy and heresy have proved thorny tasks in scholarship on the history of Islam, and the models that investigators have used to analyze such questions to date have often been simplistic and inadequate. Some scholars deny that religious authority exists as such in Islam, usually remarking that it lacks the papacy, ecclesiastical hierarchy, synods, and ratified creeds of Christianity. Others identify a single religious authority as determinative for Islam as a whole, often that of the Caliphs or theologians.² A slightly more sophisticated approach, an attempt to reconcile evidence of two competing authorities, involves the claim that a synthesis has occurred which melds both into a single orthodox approach. Thus, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) supposedly synthesized Islamic law and mysticism, creating a single Sunni orthodoxy that has lasted from his time until the present. A number of recent studies, however, describe in clear terms the existence of multiple authorities within Islam and admit that they exist in actual or potential conflict and that they have not been neutralized by a claimed synthesis.³

Islamic history shows many instances of a radical shift from one regime of religious authority to another,⁴ and the rise of the authority of Twelver Shiite jurists is particularly striking, given that Shiite Islam is widely held, not least by the Shiites themselves, to be based on the exclusive authority of the current Imam, who is "God's proof" on earth, the sole true representative of the Prophet Muhammad's legacy. According to Twelver Shiite doctrine, the lay believer must pledge allegiance to the Imam of the current age, the legitimate successor of the Prophet Muhammad as leader and guide of the Muslim community. The

Authority, 66, 70–1, 149–50, 218, 221; Bayhom-Daou, *Shaykh Mufid*, 121–9; Gleave, "Shī‘ī Jurisprudence."

- 2 For an example of exclusive attention to theology, see Henderson, *Construction of Orthodoxy*. For an example of exclusive attention to the Imamate, see Henri Laoust, *Les schismes dans l'islam*.
- 3 Stewart, "Authority and Orthodoxy"; Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*; Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*; Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*; Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*; Abou El-Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*; Kugle, *Rebel between Spirit and Law*; Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet*; Schmidtke and Kramer, *Speaking for Islam*; Aigle, *Les autorités religieuses*; Clayer et al., *L'autorité religieuse*.
- 4 It is nevertheless true that for Sunni societies, the regimes of juristic and monarchical authority have often enjoyed a long and stable existence in partnership or compromise, at least from the eleventh century to the eighteenth century, and one could even argue to the present day in some societies.

twelfth and current Imam, however, is in occultation (*ghayba*), which means that his identity is not generally known, nor can one purposefully locate him. Born *ca* 256/871 CE, he is alive and well, circulating *incognito* among the believers, and now over 1,100 years old, his life having been prolonged like those of Noah and other revered figures of salvation history. Regular communication with him is not possible, though believers may see him in visions or dreams or meet him without realizing at the moment that he is in fact the Twelfth Imam.⁵ In the Imam's effective absence during the Occultation, experts in Islamic law have come to serve as the main religious authorities in the Twelver Shiite tradition. The Shiite layman is obligated to adopt as the basis for his religious practice the opinions of a leading scholar who is recognized as a principal legal authority (*marji‘ al-taqlīd*), in recent times designated by the title *Āyat Allāh Uzma*, “Greater Sign of God.” The authority of Twelver Shiite jurists has been obvious enough in recent history, particularly after the Iranian Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, but the justification of their authority remains a question, since theoretical statements are few and far between and seem to be overwhelmed and contradicted by statements concerning the authority of the Imams.⁶

To deny the authority of the Imams would be to give up the essence of Shiism, so the authority of Shiite jurists must be portrayed as an extension of that of the Imams. This strategy is parallel to the justification of religious authority in Islam in general after the demise of the Prophet: novel religious authorities are regularly justified as deriving from the Prophet’s authority. This

5 According to some authorities, the Imam has been seen from time to time and has been in correspondence with others. According to Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisi (d. 111/1699), one can communicate with the Twelfth Imam by writing him a letter and leaving it on the tomb of any of the Imams, or fastened and sealed and buried or cast into the sea or a well. Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion*, 235–6.

6 Many manuals on Islam, as well as specialized studies on Twelver Shiite Islam such as Donaldson’s *The Shi'ite Religion* (1933), simply ignore the authority of Twelver jurists and focus on the Imamate. Newman writes that the authority of jurists is not independent, at least in theory, because it derives from the authority of the Imams, but he notes that modern statements come close to claiming independence, thereby bypassing the authority of the Imams (Newman, “Development and Political Significance,” 6). Laoust stresses that Islamic religious authority in Twelver Shiism, as presented by al-Allāma al-Ḥilli (d. 726/1325) in his famous work *Minhāj al-karāma*, belongs exclusively to the Twelve Imams, who are the only legitimate *ulū al-amr* “those who hold authority” (Q 4:59). Laoust, “Les fondements de l’autorité.” Note that al-Ḥilli wrote this while he was himself the leading Twelver jurist of his time, nearly four centuries after the Greater Occultation had begun, and despite the fact that he was a champion of the jurists’ religious authority.

is usually done by citing a scriptural text, either a Qur'anic verse or a hadith report, that is interpreted as an unambiguous reference to the particular office or group claiming authority. Among such proof texts cited frequently in Islamic tradition are Q 4:59, known as "the authority verse" (*āyat al-umarā'*): *aṭī'ū llāha wa-aṭī'ū r-rasūla wa-ulū l-amri minkum*, "Obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you"; Q 16:43: *fa-s'alū ahla dh-dhikri in kuntum lā ta'lāmūn*, "So ask the people of remembrance, if you do not know"; the hadith report *al-'ulamā' warathat al-anbiyā'*, "Scholars are the heirs of prophets"; and others.⁷ These are interpreted variously, with different groups each claiming that the terms *ulū l-amr*, *ahl al-dhikr*, or *'ulamā'* refer unambiguously to their members or their leaders. The theory currently used most often to justify Twelver juridical authority is the claim that the jurist acts as the general deputy (*al-nā'ib al-āmm*) of the Imam, which is based chiefly on the interpretation of a hadith report attributed to the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), and included in *al-Kāfi*, the canonical hadith collection of Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941). Known as the *maqbūla* or "acceptable report" of 'Umar b. Ḥanzala, it records a question he put to the Imam regarding Shiite litigants who resort to illegitimate rulers and the judges they appoint to settle a dispute. The Imam explained that this was forbidden and that the proper course of action would be to do the following:

Look to one of your number who relates our traditions, considers what we have permitted and what we have forbidden, and knows our legal rulings. Accept his judgment, for I have made such a person judge over you. If he gives a verdict according to our ruling, and it is not accepted from him, it will be as if the rejecter had scoffed at the verdict of God and rebuked us, and he who rebukes us is like one who rebukes God, which is tantamount to polytheism.⁸

⁷ See Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 214–17. While there are many such scriptural proof-texts of authority, a number of studies imply that the hadith report *al-'ulamā' warathat al-anbiyā'* is unique in this regard or at least the most important text of this kind. Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, 94; Zwemer, *Heirs of the Prophets*; Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*; Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*; Takim, *Heirs of the Prophet*. There are scores of such proof texts, some of which are general, cited by many different groups arguing for their own authority, and some of which are particular to certain groups. At least five or six are cited very frequently, and the list could be expanded considerably.

⁸ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 7:412.

Several similar reports appear in the canonical works of Shiite hadith, though this is the most widely cited of them. Calder has termed them as a category “delegation traditions,” and Sachedina, “investiture traditions.”⁹

Most western scholars writing before the late twentieth century assumed that the jurists’ authority in Twelver Shiism was devoid of justification and simply an *ad hoc* measure undertaken in response to the conditions of the Occultation. An awareness of the modern Twelver juridical hierarchy before and after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 changed this, raising questions about the bases of their power and authority, particularly in modern Iranian society. Scholars reported on the theory of general deputyship (*niyāba ‘āmma*) in the modern Iranian religious establishment. Since 1980, several studies have attempted to address both the actual increase in the social power exercised by Twelver jurists and the historical development of the theoretical justification of their authority, singling out the sixteenth century, which witnessed the rise of the Safavid polity, as a crucial period for the establishment of the jurists’ authority.¹⁰ Calder traced the jurists’ increasingly strong claims for their authority over the judiciary, *zakāt*, *khums*, *jihad*, and Friday prayer between the tenth and the sixteenth century, but found that its most explicit justification, the theory that the jurist was the general deputy of the Imam, did not appear until the work of ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Āl al-Karakī (d. 940/1534) and was fully incorporated into the Shiite legal system by Zayn al-Dīn al-Āmilī (d. 965/1558), who cited as evidence the hadith of ‘Umar b. Ḥanẓala and another similar report.¹¹ No earlier justifications using those specific terms have been identified. The *niyāba ‘āmma* theory became generally accepted in the sixteenth century and did not remain an obscure discussion buried in legal tomes. The term *nā’ib al-imām*, “deputy of the Imam,” is applied to al-Karakī himself as the leading jurist of the realm in an edict issued by the Safavid monarch Shah Tahmasp (1524–76) on 16 Dhū al-Hijja 939/9 July 1533.¹² Later in the sixteenth century Mīrzā Makhdūm Shīrāzī (d. 995/1587) claimed in *al-Nawāqid fī al-radd ‘alā al-rwāfiq*, a diatribe

⁹ Calder, “The Structure of Authority,” 71–3; Calder, “Judicial Authority in Imami Shi‘i Jurisprudence”; Momen, *An Introduction to Shiite Islam*, 197–9; Sachedina, *The Just Ruler*, 135–42, 203, 222; Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 215; Takim, *Heirs of the Prophet*, 137–8.

¹⁰ For an overview, see Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 8–13.

¹¹ Calder, “The Structure of Authority”; Calder, “Judicial Authority in Imami Shi‘i Jurisprudence”; Calder, “Accommodation and Revolution”; Calder, “Doubt and Prerogative”; Calder, “Khums in Imāmī Shi‘ī Jurisprudence”; Calder, “Zakāt in Imāmī Shi‘ī Jurisprudence.”

¹² Al-Isfahānī, *Riyād al-‘ulamā’*, 3:455–60; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabrisī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, 3:432–4; al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, 8:210; Calder, “The Structure of Authority,” 158–9; Beeson, “The Origins of Conflict,” 64–9; Arjomand, “Two Decrees of Shāh Tahmāsp,” 252–6.

against Twelver Shiism and the Safavid dynasty, that according to the Shiites the jurist who has attained the level of *ijtihād* is the general deputy (*al-nā'ib al-‘āmm*) of the Imam during the Occultation, that he stands in place of the Imam in all things (*wa-huwa qā’im maqām al-Imām fī kull shay’*), and that no one but him is allowed to grant legal opinions or judge cases.¹³ While Mīrzā Makhdūm’s polemical account is likely exaggerated, it shows that the theory was widely known during his period. It has remained the main argument for the authority of the jurists until the present.¹⁴ That the chief justification for the jurists’ authority supposedly did not appear until nearly six hundred years after the Greater Occultation of 329/941 is noteworthy. While the theoretical justification of an institution may not necessarily coincide with its establishment, one would not expect such a tremendous delay, given the prominent religious, social, political, and intellectual roles played by Twelver jurists in the intervening centuries. Al-Mufid’s theory of delegation shows that already in the Buwayhid period, perhaps only decades after the Lesser Occultation, Shiite jurists presented theoretical justification for their religious authority and their assumption of several of the prerogatives of the Hidden Imam.

The modern doctrinal position of the Twelver Shiites – representing the Uṣūlī tradition, not that of the Akhbārīs, who hold that authority after the Occultation lies in the *akhbār* of the Imams – is that the transition from Imams to jurists, if not seamless, was logical and inevitable, a direct and divinely intended outcome of the Greater Occultation in 329/941. However, most descriptions of the transition from one regime of authority to the other are simplistic and unconvincing, suggesting that the shift was foreseen all along or an inevitable consequence of extraneous circumstances. One need only look at the case of the Nizārī Ismā’īlis, who in 542/1148, after a period of “concealment” (*satr*) of the Imam, rediscovered the legitimate descendant of their former Imam Nizār in the person of Ḥasan II, ‘alā dhikrihi al-salām, to see that other responses to the problem were indeed possible.¹⁵ Another historical solution was to maintain contact with a hidden Imam through an intermediary: this mode was adopted in Imāmī Shiism during the Lesser Occultation (260–329/874–941) and by the Bohra or Ṭāyyibī Ismā’īlī Shiites, who have recognized the authority of a succession of representatives of the concealed Imam, termed the *dā’ī muṭlaq*,

¹³ Mīrzā Makhdūm al-Shīrāzī, *al-Nawāqid*, fol. 88r.

¹⁴ A very extensive modern justification of the authority of Twelver jurists is found in the work of al-Muntażirī, *Dirásāt fī wilāyat al-faqīh*.

¹⁵ See Daftary, *The Ismā’īlis*, 358–64.

"supreme missionary," from 524/1130 until the present.¹⁶ Yet another type of response was to find an alternative descendant to assume the position of the Imam, something that occurred many times in the history of Zaydī Shiism, in the scores of 'Alid rebellions under the Umayyads and Abbasids, and in the selection of Mūsā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799) for the Imamate after the death of his elder brother Ismā'īl in 158/775. It also occurred after the death of the eleventh Imam, Ḥasan al-'Askarī, in 260/874, when the deceased Imam's brother Ja'far (d. 271/884–85) nearly succeeded in garnering the Imamate for himself.

Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Karājikī (d. 449/1057)

In addition to al-Mufid's *Muqni'a* and al-Ṭūsī's *Nihāya*, another text from the Buwayhid period that presents an unambiguous argument for the authority of Twelver Shiite jurists during the Occultation is a doctrinal statement preserved in *Kanz al-fawā'id*, an anthology of Shiite religious texts by Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Karājikī, one of al-Shaykh al-Mufid's students. Little is known of the origins and youth of al-Karājikī, whose name may derive from *karājik*, a type of tent that an ancestor of his specialized in making.¹⁷ After studying law and theology under al-Shaykh al-Mufid and al-Sharīf al-Murtadā in Baghdad around the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century, he traveled widely in Syria and Egypt, and he transmits texts from authorities in Aleppo, Cairo, Mecca, Baghdad, and elsewhere. Autobiographical notes in his works place him in Mayyāfāriqīn (now Silvan, near Diyarbakir in southeastern Turkey) in 399/1008–9; Ramla in 410/1019–20, 412/1021–2, and 416/1025–6; Mecca in 412/1021–2; Egypt in 407/1016–17, 424/1032–3, and 426/1034–5; Tyre in 418/1027–8, Tripoli in 436/1044–5; and Sidon in 441/1049–50. The title judge applied to him in biographical sources indicates that he was appointed to that office in the course of his career, perhaps in Ramla, Tripoli, or Tyre.¹⁸ Sunni sources present biographical notices

¹⁶ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 261–9.

¹⁷ Al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, 9:401.

¹⁸ Ibn Shahrashūb, *Ma'ālim al-'ulamā'*, 105–6; al-Rāzī, *Fihrist asmā' 'ulamā' al-shī'a*, 154; al-Hurr al-'Āmilī, *Amal al-'Āmil*, 2:287–8; al-Īsfahānī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, 5:139–41; Baḥr al-'Ulūm, *al-Fawā'id al-rijālīya*, 3:302–8; al-Khwānsārī, *Rawdāt al-jannāt*, 6:195–200; al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, 3:497–501; al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, 9:400–1; Kahhālā, *Mu'jam al-mu'allifīn*, 11:27; al-Qummī, *al-Fawā'id al-radawīya*, 571–4; Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur (GAL)*, GI:354; SI:602; Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums (GAS)*, 1:551; Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī, *Tabaqāt a'lām al-shī'a*, 2:177–9; idem, *al-Dhāri'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, passim (under the titles of al-Karājikī's works); Etan Kohlberg, *Medieval Muslim Scholar*, 109, 164–6, 197–8, 209–10, 212, 225–6, 269, 275, 302, 314, 317–8, 337.

devoted to him, drawing ultimately on a lost Shiite biographical work, *al-Ḥāwī*, by Yahyā b. Ḥumayda Ibn Abī Ṭayy (d. 630/1232–3), a Shiite scholar of Aleppo.¹⁹ Al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) in *Tārīkh al-islām*, ‘Abd Allāh al-Yāfi‘ī (d. 768/1366) in *Mirāt al-jinān*, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) in *Lisān al-mīzān*, and Ibn al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1089/1679) in *Shadharāt al-dhahab* all describe him as a leading scholar of the Shiites, learned in grammar, lexicography, astrology, medicine, and theology, who wrote many works and died in Tyre in Rabī‘ II 449/June 1057.²⁰ Al-Dhahabī gives the exact date as 4 Rabī‘ II 449/10 June 1057, while Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī reports 2 Rabī‘ II 449/8 June 1057.²¹

Al-Karājikī is not among the most prominent figures in the history of Twelver scholarship. Modarressi describes him as an adherent of the rationalist school in Twelver jurisprudence and one of the main students of al-Shaykh al-Mufid and al-Sharif al-Murtadā, along with Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Buṣrāwī (d. 443/1051), Sālār (Abū Ya’lā Ḥamza) b. ‘Abd al-Azīz al-Daylamī (d. 448/1056), and al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Azīz Ibn al-Barrāj al-Shāmī (d. 481/1088). According to Modarressi, “their original contributions are less conspicuous” than those of al-Mufid and al-Murtadā.²² Al-Karājikī has been mentioned fairly frequently in modern scholarship, but mainly because he included an abridgement of al-Shaykh al-Mufid’s lost manual of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) in *Kanz al-fawā’id*.²³ Poonawala mentions that al-Karājikī abridged the works *Da’ā’im al-islām* and *Sharḥ al-akhbār* of the Ismā‘ilī jurist al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974); this may be the source of the idea, widespread in later Twelver sources, that al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān was actually a Twelver Shiite.²⁴

Brockelmann, *GAL*, at G1:354 states erroneously that al-Karājikī was born in Egypt in 425/1034. At S1:602 he corrects this error but has a typographical error in the death date, giving 499/1057 for the intended date, 449/1057.

¹⁹ Ibn Abī Ṭayy, *al-Ḥāwī fī rijāl*.

²⁰ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām*, 29:236–7; al-Dhahabī, *al-Ibar*, 3:220; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-huffāz*, 3:1127; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a’lām al-nubalā*, 18:121–2; al-Yāfi‘ī, *Mirāt al-janān*, 3:70; Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mīzān*, 5:300; Ibn al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 5:214.

²¹ See ‘Alī Rīḍā Hizār’s introduction to al-Karājikī, *Ma’dīn al-jawāhir*; al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, “Maktabat al-Allāma al-Karājikī.”

²² Modarressi, *Introduction*, 43–4.

²³ Brunschwig, “Les *Uṣūl al-fiqh* Imāmites a leur stade ancien,” 326; McDermott, *Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufid*, 28; Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:551; Calder, “The Structure of Authority,” 175, 210; Zysow, “The Economy of Certainty,” 498; Modarressi, *Introduction*, 7; Madelung, “Die Šī‘a,” 2:365; Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 133–4; Moussavi, *Religious Authority*, 24, 79; Amir-Moezzi, “Remarques sur les critères d’authenticité du hadith,” 19, n. 54.

²⁴ Poonawala, “A Reconsideration,” 572.

No substantial secondary study has been devoted to al-Karājikī. Rađī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭawūs (d. 664/1266) had a bibliography (*Fihrist*) of al-Karājikī's works in his possession, and Mīrzā Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 1320/1902) presented the full text of the bibliography in his *Mustadrak al-wasā'il*. More recently, al-Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī edited and published a manuscript copy from the Central Library of Tehran University in 1995–6. Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī supposed that the author of the bibliography was al-Karājikī's son Mūsā, on what evidence it is not clear, while ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī stated that its author was a student of al-Karājikī and son of a contemporary scholar.²⁵ Aside from the bibliography, most of what is known about al-Karājikī derives from *Kanz al-fawā'id*, which includes anecdotes and treatises on grammar, exegesis, law, and other topics, though overall it stresses Twelver theology.²⁶ A number of works by al-Karājikī have been published; most of these separate titles are treatises included in *Kanz al-fawā'id*.²⁷

Al-Karājikī on Religious Authority during the Occultation

Al-Karājikī wrote extensively on the Imamate in *Kanz al-fawā'id* and other works, in conversation not only with Sunni opponents but also with Ismā‘ilis. The Fatimids had conquered Egypt in 969 and controlled parts of Palestine and Syria until the fall of the dynasty in 1171, and al-Karājikī, though he had studied in Baghdad, spent most of his career in Fatimid territory, serving as judge in one or more cities of Palestine and Syria. His writings refer to debates that he held with Ismā‘ilis and others during his trips to Egypt, which may have been frequent. He was in Egypt in 424/1032–33 and 426/1034–35,²⁸ and may have lived there for several years. Soumaïya Hamdani makes the astute observation, “Just as Ismaili Shi‘ism responded to the Sunni difference of opinion regarding imama by emphasizing their arguments regarding it and presenting a historical justification for the ‘Alid succession, one can suppose that

²⁵ Al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-wasā'il*, 3:497–9; Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dhari'a*, 9:298; Kohlberg, *Medieval Muslim Scholar*, 164–6; al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, “Maktabat al-‘Allāma al-Karājikī,” 377–95. Al-Nūrī notes that the text is missing several lines at the end.

²⁶ A lithograph edition of *Kanz al-fawā'id* was published in Tabriz in 1904. Modern editions have been published in Qum in the 1970s and Beirut in 1985, but they are less accurate than the lithograph edition. A Persian translation was completed by Muḥammad Bāqir Kamara-ī and published with the title *Ganjīna-i ma‘arif-i Shī'a-i Imāmīya: dar rāh-i jihād-i sāzandagī*, in Tehran in 1982.

²⁷ See the bibliography.

²⁸ Al-Karājikī, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, 332, 353.

developments within Twelver Shi‘ism were on some level taken into consideration in the shaping of Ismaili thought and vice-versa.”²⁹ Al-Karājikī is one of the main figures in Twelver intellectual history whose thought was shaped directly by Ismā‘ilī views and religious literature; he was certainly familiar with Ismā‘ilī arguments on the Imamate as well as law and other theological topics, for he abridged *Da‘ā’im al-islām* by al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān, which addressed these issues.³⁰ The Twelver doctrine of the Greater Occultation, a frequent topic of Sunni anti-Shiite polemic, must have come up often as well in Twelver debates with Ismā‘ilis, who likely cited the advantages of having a present Imam and the disadvantages or outright illogicality of having an Imam in occultation. Al-Karājikī wrote a treatise on the Occultation, included in *Kanz al-fawā’id*, entitled *al-Burhān ‘alā shīhat tūl ‘umr al-Imām, Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* (The Proof of the Truth of the Great Age of the Imam, the Ruler of this Era), the main argument of which is that since other famous figures have had their lives prolonged by God, it is not surprising that this is the case with the Twelfth Imam.³¹ The text under consideration here, which appears toward the end of *Kanz al-fawā’id*, is a commentary on the Qur‘anic verse 9.122, which al-Karājikī interprets as supporting the legitimacy of the Twelver doctrine of the Imamate. Appended to the commentary is a section bearing the rubric “Question on the Occultation” (*Su‘āl fī al-ghayba*). The combined text – the commentary on Q 9.122 together with the appended question and answer – is difficult to date precisely, for al-Karājikī compiled *Kanz al-fawā’id* late in his life and included in it texts from many different periods.

The two sections of the text reflect the dilemma facing Twelver jurists from the Greater Occultation until the present. Twelver jurists upheld the general Twelver theory of the Imamate, according to which a specific line of descendants of the Prophet, each designated explicitly by his predecessor, were the legitimate rulers and religious guides of the Muslim community. Even during the Occultation, they could hardly be expected to deny the Imams’ authority, for this was the hallmark of the Shiite tradition, but they in some way needed to recognize the authority of the jurists in order to justify the current workings of religious authority in the Twelver community. If they merely argued for the authority of jurists, however, they risked contradicting the Twelvers’ inherited emphasis on the authority of the Imams and agreeing with their Sunni opponents regarding the position of jurists. Al-Karājikī’s first section there-

²⁹ Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 57, 91–2. See also Daftary, “al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān.”

³⁰ See the section on allegiance to the Imam (*walāya*) in al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān, *The Pillars of Islam*, 1:18–122.

³¹ Al-Karājikī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, 243–69.

fore argues strongly for the authority of the Imams, while the second section suggests that Twelver jurists indeed have religious authority but insists that it derives from that of the Imamate and is therefore quite distinct from the religious authority Sunni jurists arrogate to themselves, even though in practical terms it might appear quite similar.

The most striking aspect of al-Karājīkī's text is its frank description of Twelver Shiite jurists, justifying their authority broadly by identifying them as intermediaries (*wasā'it*) between the common believers or subjects (*ra'yā*) and the hidden Imam. The explicit reference to jurists makes this text valuable evidence for the history of Twelver religious authority. In the passages of *al-Muqni'a* and *al-Nihāya* to which Crone refers, al-Shaykh al-Mufid and al-Shaykh al-Tūsī had already indicated Shiite jurists unambiguously, rather than scholars in general, using the terms *fuqahā' shī'atihim*, "the jurists of their [the Imams'] followers," *al-fuqahā' min shī'at al-a'imma*, "the jurists among the followers of the Imams," and *fuqahā' ahl al-haqq*, "the jurists of the adherents to the Truth." Similarly, al-Karājīkī refers to jurists specifically, using the same phrase al-Mufid had used: *al-fuqahā' min shī'at al-a'imma*, "the jurists among the followers of the Imams." In al-Karājīkī's view, Twelver scholars have authority during the Greater Occultation by virtue of their expertise in law in particular, and not in theology, hadith, or any other field.

As in Sunni texts, the general term '*ulamā'*, "scholars," that appears in many claims to religious authority does not distinguish between professional groups of scholars specializing in particular fields. A proof text such as *al-'ulamā' warathat al-anbiyā'*, for example, may refer to any of several distinct categories of scholars, whether jurists (*fuqahā'*), theologians (*mutakallimūn*), hadith experts (*muḥaddithūn* or *aṣḥāb al-hadīth*), experts on the Qur'an (*qurrā'* or *mufassirūn*), philosophers (*falsāfa*), or others. The term '*ulamā'* may refer to a general, super-category, including scholars of various specialties, but more often than not a restricted sense is intended: '*ulamā'* may mean theologians, jurists, or hadith experts in particular and not scholars in general, depending on the context.³² This ambiguity has caused much confusion in treatments of Islamic intellectual history and in scholarship on Twelver Shiism. In addition, in the Twelver tradition the term '*ulamā'* may refer to the Imams themselves, for they were recognized as the repositories of religious knowledge.³³ Indeed, in the Twelver theory of legal consensus developed during the Buwayhid

³² Calder, "The Structure of Authority," 66–7; Stewart, "Authority and Orthodoxy"; Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 1–2, 25–30; Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 13–19; Takim, *Heirs of the Prophet*, 11–12.

³³ Kohlberg, "Imam and Community," 25–6.

period, the hidden Imam was in a sense redefined as a scholar whose opinion guaranteed the collective guidance of the Twelver jurists, ensuring that they not collectively err.³⁴ For this reason, it is not clear to whom the Shiite author Abū al-Naḍr Muḥammad al-‘Ayyāshī al-Samarqandī (fl. fourth/tenth century) was referring when he penned *Kitāb fard tā‘at al-‘ulamā’* (Book on the Obligation to Obey the Scholars), the title of which announces a claim to religious authority.³⁵ Did he mean jurists, theologians, hadith experts, or all three? Alternatively, did he mean the scholars, including the Imams? Passages of the *Tafsīr* attributed to al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (d. 260/874) portray a division of the Shiite community into “scholars” (*al-‘ulamā’*) and lay believers, literally “the weak” (*al-ḍu‘afā’*), which one may also understand as a claim to religious authority.³⁶ Arjomand emphasizes theology when discussing scholars such as the Nawbakhtīs, al-Shaykh al-Mufid, and al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, but recognition of the eventual prominence of law in both Sunni and Twelver Shiite Islam caused him to use the term “nomocratic theology.”³⁷ Similarly, Moezzi refers to the scholars in question as “jurist-theologians.”³⁸ Takim coins the odd term “*shari‘ man*” to capture the several possible senses of scholar while nevertheless giving primacy to the law in some fashion.³⁹ The distinction between specialties was often a literary convention, for the same scholar evidently wore different hats on different occasions, but the distinction was nevertheless important, for it was a particular expertise or professional training that granted the scholar authority, to the exclusion of other distinct expertises.⁴⁰

The question regarding the Occultation in al-Karājikī’s text is not posed within the frame of bringing a suit before a judge or executing the standard punishments – the framework of the reference to delegation in *al-Muqni‘a* and *al-Nihāya* – but rather within that of petitioning for legal opinions or seeking religious guidance, which is more general in scope. In comparison with al-Karājikī’s text, the contemporary works of al-Sharīf al-Murtadā and al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī that address the authority of jurists to grant legal opinions are more circumspect and ambiguous. Al-Ṭūsī, for example, explains at some length why it is *permissible* for lay petitioners to consult Shiite jurists about

³⁴ Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 155–65. This is often stated explicitly: “the Imam, who is one of the scholars”; al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, *Rasā‘il*, 1:208.

³⁵ Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 210–14.

³⁶ Kohlberg, “Imam and Community,” 41–3.

³⁷ Arjomand, “The Consolation of Theology,” 570.

³⁸ Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism*, 137.

³⁹ Takim, *Heirs of the Prophet*, 15–23.

⁴⁰ Calder, “The Structure of Authority,” 224; Stewart, “Authority and Orthodoxy.”

Islamic legal questions. He did not defend the *obligation* of Shiite laymen to consult their jurists. In this case, the particular debates in which al-Ṭūsī was involved with other theologians in Baghdad, particularly Mu’tazilīs, may have determined his framing of the issue. By arguing for the permissibility of consulting jurists on legal issues, he was contradicting the view of Baghdadi Mu’tazilīs that laypeople could not blindly adopt the opinions of authorities on theology and even, some claimed, on the law as well, but that they needed to form their own convictions on the matter.⁴¹ Examination of the discussions of the jurisconsult (*muftī*) and the lay petitioner (*mustaftī*) in al-Ṭūsī’s *Uddat al-uṣūl* and al-Sharīf al-Murtadā’s *al-Dhāri'a ilā uṣūl al-shari'a* suggests that they upheld the authority of jurists, but these texts provide little explicit theoretical justification for that authority.⁴²

Though al-Karājīkī does not state this outright, his text is evidently a refutation of a Sunni argument for the layman’s obligation to perform *taqlīd*, that is, to have recourse to a qualified jurist for formal opinions on the Sacred Law. Verse 9.122, along with verses 4.59 and 16.43, is one of the Qur’anic texts most commonly cited in Sunni works of jurisprudence as evidence for the obligation of laypeople to adopt the opinions of professional jurists on authority (*taqlīd*). For example, in the chapter on *taqlīd al-mujtahid*, “adopting the opinions of the master-jurist,” in *al-Fuṣūl fī al-uṣūl*, Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/980) argues for the obligation of laypeople to consult qualified jurists. He cites Q 16.43 and 9.122, and then writes, “When a layperson who is not capable of independent legal reasoning (*ijtihād*) is confronted with a legal case, he must question the people of knowledge (*ahl al-ilm*) concerning it.”⁴³ Q 9.122 was apparently a standard proof text for this specific topic by the time al-Jaṣṣāṣ composed the *Fuṣūl*, and was frequently cited in the same fashion in subsequent centuries.⁴⁴ Al-Karājīkī rejects the view that this verse justifies the independent authority of jurists, arguing instead that this same verse actually serves as convincing evidence for the Twelver doctrine of the Imamate.

Al-Karājīkī does not name a specific legal theorist to whom he is responding, but his argument addresses an argument upheld by Sunni jurists in general. Al-Karājīkī states that consulting Twelver Shiite jurists is “not like recourse to those who apply legal analogy (*qiyās*), nor is dependence on their views

⁴¹ See al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, 934–9.

⁴² See Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 211–4.

⁴³ Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *al-Fuṣūl fī al-uṣūl*, 2:371; al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 2:271.

⁴⁴ Al-Qādī Abū Ya'lā, *al-Udda fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, 1225; al-Shirāzī, *al-Tabṣira fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, 2:39–40; Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Wādiḥ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, 1:278; 5:459; al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'ilm uṣūl al-fiqh*, 2:536–7; al-Zarkashī, *al-Bahr al-muḥīṭ*, 4:564. It also appears in this fashion in later Shiite works that bear Sunni influence. See al-'Allāma al-Hillī, *Tahdhīb al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl*, 207–8.

similar to dependence on the views of those who exercise subjective legal reasoning (*istihsān*) and grant opinions on the Sacred Law based on conjecture and surmise.⁴⁵ The reference in the text to scholars who perform *qiyās* and *istihsān* suggests that he is arguing against Ḥanafī or Mālikī jurists in particular, because the Shāfi‘īs rejected *istihsān* as do Ismā‘īlis and other Shiites. He could, however, have been drawing on Ismā‘īli materials that supported his view. One might compare his basic argument to that of al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān in *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*, one chapter of which explains that having recourse to the Imams (*al-radd ilā al-a‘imma*) is not equivalent to *taqlīd*,⁴⁶ and which includes similar references to *qiyās* and *istihsān*.⁴⁷ Neither *Da‘ā’im al-islām* nor *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib* cites this verse or refers to Sunni commentaries on it, so al-Karājikī cannot be drawing his argument directly from those works. In all likelihood al-Karājikī is responding here directly to Sunni texts of *uṣūl al-fiqh*.

This does not mean that his argument was completely uninfluenced by Shiite texts. The commentary of al-‘Ayyāshī (fl. tenth century CE) includes the following hadith report, attributed to the eighth Imam, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ridā, which cites 9.122 and 16.43 as proof texts for the Imamate:

Our followers (*shū‘a*) include only those who follow us and do not go against us. When we fear, they fear, and when we are safe, they are safe. God said, “Ask the people of remembrance, if you do not know” (16.43) [and] “Of every troop of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware” (9.122).⁴⁸

This would certainly go along with the argument in the first part of al-Karājikī’s text, which presents his view concerning the theology of the Imamate. Al-‘Ayyāshī’s commentary, however, is apparently exceptional, for most of the other Shiite *tafsīrs* do not interpret 9.122 in this manner.⁴⁹

45 Al-Karājikī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, 303.

46 Al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān, *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*, 44–55.

47 Ibid., 137–75 (vs. *qiyās*), 176–98 (vs. *istihsān*).

48 Al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*, 2:117.

49 For the early commentaries, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 125–203. Neither al-Ṭūsī in *al-Tibyān al-jāmi‘ li-‘ulūm al-Qur‘ān* nor al-Ṭabarī in *Majma‘ al-bayān* interprets this verse as a proof text for the Imamate or for jurists. Al-Ṭūsī mentions that it is cited to support the acceptance of *khabar al-wāhid*, an isolated hadith report, i.e., one with a single chain of transmission, an argument that he rejects.

Q 9.122, together with 4.59 and 16.43, is also one of the major authority verses, and has been claimed to refer both to jurists and to hadith experts. In fact, the term *tā’ifa* that is used in many contexts where the competition between various groups' claims of authority, and on account of which Cooperson refers to the “*tā’ifa* model” of religious authority, derives ultimately from this particular verse in the Qur'an. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) cites this verse as a proof text for the authority of Sunni jurists, along with Q 4.59 and Q 16.43, in the *Kitāb al-Faqīh wa-l-mutafaqqih*.⁵⁰ ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/827) is quoted by Ḥamad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) as claiming that the term *tā’ifa* in the verse refers to *aṣḥāb al-hadīth*.⁵¹ The traditionist Yazīd b. Hārūn (d. 206/821) is reported to have asked Ḥammād b. Zayd (d. 179/795) whether God had mentioned *aṣḥāb al-hadīth* in the Qur'an, and he replied in the affirmative, citing 9.122.⁵² The reference to *qiyyās* and *istihsān* indicate that al-Karājikī was reacting to the obligation to recognize rationalist jurists in particular as authorities, and not hadith experts or traditionalist jurists, but it is clear that the import of 9.122 for questions of religious authority had been contested long before he was writing, and his argument that the verse justifies the Shiīte Imamate is clearly meant to counter claims for the authority of Sunni jurists.

Both the Ismā‘īlīs and the Twelvers denounced *qiyyās*, “analogy,” which they considered equivalent to *tarjīm*, “taking shots in the dark,” going against mainstream Sunni jurisprudence of the ninth, tenth, and subsequent centuries, which accepted four main sources: Qur'an, Sunna, *ijmā'*, and *qiyyās* or *ijtihād*.⁵³ The Twelvers of al-Karājikī's day had inherited a number of hadith reports that rejected *qiyyās*, equating it with unsupported personal opinion. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is supposed to have said, “Beware of analogy in legal rulings, for the first to use analogy was the Devil.”⁵⁴ Some material in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi* suggests a theory of legal hermeneutics based on only two principal sources, Qur'an and Sunna.⁵⁵ Al-Qāḍī al-Nū'mān's *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib* presents a theory of legal hermeneutics based on three sources: Qur'an, Sunna, and the current Imam's opinion. Al-Shaykh al-Mufid's book on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, as abridged by al-Karājikī, gives a short statement on *qiyyās*, simply stating that we do not use it with regard to legal rulings and that anyone who does is in error. Both

⁵⁰ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Faqīh wa-l-mutafaqqih*, 1:1.

⁵¹ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 5:112; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Sharaf aṣḥāb al-hadīth*, 113.

⁵² Al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *Ma'rifat 'ulūm al-hadīth*, 171; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Sharaf aṣḥāb al-hadīth*, 113.

⁵³ Gleave, “Imāmī Shī‘ī Refutations of Qiyās.”

⁵⁴ Al-Karājikī, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, 297. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq is supposed to have made a similar statement. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:58.

⁵⁵ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:54–62.

al-Ṭūsī and al-Sharīf al-Murtadā included long sections on *qiyās* in their works of *uṣūl al-fiqh* in which they argue at length against its application to the law.⁵⁶ Al-Ṭūsī presents a series of four sources of the law, including the Qur'an, Sunna (including the hadith reports of the Imams, and not just the Prophet), consensus (which the rationalist jurists of the Buwayhid period accepted at least formally), but substituting *dalīl al-‘aql*, "rational argument," for *qiyās*. Al-Ṭūsī apparently made this move, which was in accord with some Mu‘tazilī presentations of the sources of the law such as that of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044) in *al-Mu‘tamad*, in order to present a four-source theory of the law without giving up the traditional Twelver rejection of *qiyās*. Twelver sources depicted Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq as debating Abū Ḥanifa (d. 150/767) on the topic of *qiyās* and roundly stumping him, and al-Karājīkī includes one of these debates in *Kanz al-fawā’id*.⁵⁷ He also records a debate he had with a Sunni jurist on *qiyās* at Dār al-‘Ilm in Cairo, an institute of learning founded by the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim (386–411/996–1021) in 395/1005 and housed in the caliphal palace.⁵⁸ The most prominent examples in these debates involve pairs of legal rulings that appear paradoxical if one approaches them using analogy. For example, a menstruating woman must make up the days of fasting she misses, but not the prayers, even though prayer is generally viewed as a more serious matter than fasting; it is forbidden to set animals of the same size and strength against one another, as in a cock-fight, while it is permitted to set a stronger animal against a much weaker one when hunting; it is permitted for men to have intercourse with female slaves whom they own, but it is forbidden for females to have intercourse with male slaves whom they own; and so on.⁵⁹ Analogy would require the rulings in such cases to be the same, but jurists agree that they are not; for Twelvers, this indicated the invalidity of analogical reasoning for legal questions in general.

A number of modern scholars have addressed the historical conflict between *akhbār*-jurists and rational jurists in Twelver Shiism. A similar struggle was also occurring simultaneously in Sunni Islam, in the course of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. In fact, al-Mufid, al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, and the other major jurists of the Buwayhid period argued in their writings for the exclusion of

56 Al-Ṭūsī, *Uddat al-uṣūl*, 253–90; al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, *al-Dharī'a ilā uṣūl al-shari'a*, 656–792.

57 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:58; al-Karājīkī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, 196–8. These debates are apocryphal and were probably based on later actual debates between Shiite and Ḥanafī jurists that have been projected back to earlier generations.

58 Al-Karājīkī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, 293–7. On Dār al-‘Ilm, also called Dār al-Ḥikma, see Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 189; Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, 71–84.

59 Al-Karājīkī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, 294–5.

the hadith experts or hadith-jurists from religious authority,⁶⁰ and according to Modarressi, they succeeded in sweeping away the school of hadith-based Twelver jurisprudence.⁶¹ Al-Murtadā writes that one cannot simply lift rulings from a book of Shiite hadith or law such as al-Mufid's *Muqni'a*, Ibn Bābawayh's *Risāla*, al-Kulaynī's *Kāfi*, or al-Ḥalabī's *Kitāb*, and present them as answers to legal questions without being an expert in the analysis of such matters and without presenting proof.⁶² Similarly, al-Ṭūsī states that any scholar who does not know the requisite parts of jurisprudence will necessarily be a mere "reporter" (*hāki*) or professor of others' opinions (*muqallid*),⁶³ a statement that seems intended to apply to hadith experts in particular.

In addition to the issue of authority, what was at stake seems to have been the question of certainty in the law. Al-Karajikī is concerned not to portray Twelver jurists as guessing or coming up with their own theories, but deciding issues based on the texts that have been related from the Imams.⁶⁴ The way that he describes the process of *istiftā* shows the formalist approach of Twelver jurists, for it emphasizes that they are acting as the custodians of textual material rather than investigators of rational issues. For this reason, a hadith report in *al-Kāfi* insists that the *muftī* is a guarantor (*dāmin*): in other words, he vouches for the truth of the advice that he gives and takes personal responsibility for any acts the lay petitioner may make as a consequence of that advice.⁶⁵ Al-Kulaynī's report is based on the idea that the *muftī*'s formal opinion should comply with the objective – perhaps concealed – truth and not simply what appears outwardly to be true. It therefore should be correct, and if it is wrong, he will be at fault and held responsible.

Al-Karajikī's use of the term *wasā'it*, "intermediaries," in particular suggests continuity between the Lesser and Greater Occultations. While indicating jurists here, it had ordinarily been used to denote the *wakīls* or *safīrs*, the representatives of the Imams during the Lesser Occultation. Both al-Mufid

⁶⁰ Al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Masā'il al-Sarawīya*, passim; al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, *Rasā'il*, 1:210–13.

⁶¹ Modarressi, "Rationalism and Traditionalism"; Modarressi, *Introduction*, 32–5; Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism*.

⁶² Al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, *Rasā'il*, 2:331–3. The treatise of Ibn Bābawayh is probably a work on law by 'Ali b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 329/941) that is no longer extant. The book of 'Ubayd Allāh b. 'Ali b. Abī Shu'ba al-Kūfi al-Ḥalabī (fl. second/eighth century), a companion of the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, is titled *al-Kitāb* or *al-Jāmi'* and was widely consulted during this period, but is no longer extant. Al-Murtadā also mentions these last two works in *Jawābāt al-Mayyāfāriqīyāt*, *Rasā'il*, 1:279. See Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 380–2.

⁶³ Al-Ṭūsī, *Uddat al-uṣūl*, 2.

⁶⁴ Zysow, "The Economy of Certainty," 497–511.

⁶⁵ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 7:409.

and al-Ṭūsī apply the term to them in a number of passages discussing the Occultation. Al-Mufid states,

A group of the associates of [the eleventh Imam] Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad (Peace be upon them) witnessed his offspring during his lifetime, and they became [the Twelfth Imam’s] associates and select entourage after his death, and the intermediaries (*wasā’iṭ*) between him and his followers (*shī'a*) for a lengthy period during his concealment, during which they would transmit to the followers the dictates of their religion, bring out to them answers to their petitions, and collect the funds the followers owed to him. Al-Ḥasan had attested to the probity of this group when he was still alive, adopted them as a select group of trusted agents during his lifetime, and entrusted to them the administration of his property and the conduct of his affairs. They are well known by their names, genealogies, and appearances, such as Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-Sammān and his son Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān; the Banū al-Rahbā from Niṣṣibīn; the Banū Sa‘īd and Banū Mahziyār from al-Ahwāz; the Banū al-Rukūlī in Kufa; the Banū Nawbakht in Baghdad, and a group of the inhabitants of Qazvin, Qum, and other towns of al-Jibāl [western Iran].⁶⁶

It is evident that scholars such as al-Mufid understood that there were not only four deputies, against other views that restricted the holders of the office to just four. Arjomand suggests that the term *safīr* was intended to enhance the office of these deputies, indicating a new role or the exclusive nature of the office toward the end of the Lesser Occultation.⁶⁷ However, in their discussions of the judicial delegation, neither al-Mufid nor al-Ṭūsī uses the terms that designated the representatives of the Twelfth Imam during the Lesser Occultation, such as *safīr*, *wakil*, or *bāb*. Their passages in *al-Muqni'a* and *al-Nihāya* do not mention the Occultation per se or refer to the representatives of the Twelfth Imam who were active during the Lesser Occultation, merely stressing the fact of delegation and subordinate authority.

As it turns out, neither the term *wasā’iṭ* nor the term *tafwīd* became a major focus of later discussions of the Twelver jurists’ authority; both were supplanted by the term *al-nā’ib al-‘āmm* from the sixteenth century on. The term *wasā’iṭ* nevertheless does occur in some later Shiite texts in reference to

66 Al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Fuṣūl al-‘ashara fī al-ghayba*, 17–18. See also al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, 209–43; Kohlberg, “Imam and Community,” 40.

67 Arjomand, “The Crisis of the Imamate,” 506.

Twelver jurists. In his treatise on the legal status of Friday prayer according to Shiite Islamic law, al-Sayyid Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan al-Karakī (d. 1001/1592–93) writes that Twelver scholars (*‘ulamā’*), here certainly meaning jurists specifically, are “the intermediaries (*wasā’iṭ*) between us and the noble Imams, and the emissaries (*safara*) who relay their messages.”⁶⁸ Again, both terms evoke a continuity between the Lesser and Greater Occultations.

Did al-Karājikī conceive of the jurists as actual “go-betweens”? Is his statement a case of hyperbole or euphemism? According to accepted doctrine, while during the Lesser Occultation Twelver laypeople were able to contact the Imam through emissaries, this channel of communication was cut off with the Greater Occultation. Some texts, however, suggest that limited possibilities of communication with the Twelfth Imam remained.⁶⁹ Al-Karājikī leaves open the possibility that some jurists are actual, physical intermediaries, for he states that some jurists might be meeting with the Twelfth Imam in secret. Al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, when questioned about the difference between not having an Imam at all and having one who is in Occultation and therefore inaccessible, made this reply: “First, we consider it possible that many of his loyal supporters and those who profess his Imamate may reach him and benefit from him, and those of his followers and believers in his Imamate who neither reach him nor meet him may benefit from him during the Occultation as much as is required – in our view – for their legal obligations . . .”⁷⁰ This calls to mind the supposed rescripts of the Twelfth Imam, dated 410/1019 and 412/1022, that are addressed to al-Shaykh al-Mufid, which bolster the jurists’ authority by showing that they are in actual contact with the Hidden Imam and have been directly endorsed to serve as his representatives.⁷¹ While these texts are evidently forgeries composed after al-Shaykh al-Mufid’s death, they may date to some time not long afterwards, in the mid-eleventh century. Both the use of the term *wasā’iṭ* and the quotation of letters or edicts from the hidden Imam to leading Shiite jurists are attempts to smooth over the discontinuity between the period of the Lesser Occultation and that of the Greater Occultation.

What follows is an English translation of al-Karājikī’s text, based on the text of pp. 301–3 of the 1904 edition of *Kanz al-fawā’id*, which corresponds to vol. 2, pp. 216–19 of the 1985 edition.

⁶⁸ Al-Karakī, *al-Lum’ā fī amr ṣalāt al-jum’ā*, fol. 39r–40r.

⁶⁹ See Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, *Ikmāl al-dīn wa-itmām al-ni’mā*, 410–47; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, 152–70; Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie.”

⁷⁰ Al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, *Risāla fī ghaybat al-hujja*, 293–301 in al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, *al-Rasā’il*, 2:297.

⁷¹ Al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, 2:268–74.

Appendix: Argument for the Validity of the Imamate and the Infallibility of the Imam on the Basis of the Following Verse⁷²

God (Mighty and Sublime) said, “The believers should not all go out to fight. Of every troop of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware” (Q 9.122). God (Glorious and Exalted) encouraged the pursuit of knowledge and made it desirable, and He made it incumbent upon those who possess the necessary determination to seek it out urgently and strive to acquire it. This obligation obtains at all times, both during the time of the Messenger of God (God bless him and his family and grant them peace) and afterwards; no one age may properly lay claim to it to the exclusion of others, because legal obligation is established and irrevocable, and the Sacred Law comprehensive and permanent. Both we and those who oppose us⁷³ know that, during the time of the Prophet (God bless him and his family and grant them peace), when small groups of believers striving to acquire knowledge of the faith (*al-tafaqquh fi al-dīn*) used to come before him, he would direct them to the very truth of the matter and guide them to a singular opinion concerning God’s law and faith, and they would return to their clans in agreement, espousing one and the same opinion and not differing in their interpretation of a verse or in a ruling regarding a religious duty. What they viewed as permitted was one and the same, and what they viewed as forbidden was one and the same. Their knowledge was one and the same, and their religion was one and the same, so that through them, proof might be established,⁷⁴ the right path might become clear to those searching for guidance, the seeker might reach his desire, and the one striving for benefit might attain it.

After the demise of the Messenger of God (God bless him and his family and grant them peace), people are under the same obligations under the sacred law that were imposed on those who lived during his lifetime, and God’s justice, wisdom, bounty, and mercy dictate that He remove the impediments before His creatures and that He appoint for them in every age a trustworthy knowledgeable one, a reliable guardian whose opinions do not vary and whose acts do not contradict one another.⁷⁵ In their hearts, people would trust in his knowledge and perfection and have faith in his purity and infallibility, and consequently resort to him and depend on him for guidance.

72 Al-Karājikī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, 301–3 (Tabriz edition); 2:216–19 (Beirut edition).

73 *Mukhālifūnā*, “our opponents,” *man khālafanā*, “he who opposes us,” and similar terms are commonly used in Shiite texts to designate Sunnis, and this would appear to be the case here.

74 Reading *tuthbata* for *thabata* in the text, in order to maintain parallelism with the following verbs, which are all in the present.

75 Reading *lā tataḍādu* for *lā yataḍādu* in the text.

If this were not the case, then Exalted God would have commanded that one resort to those whose opinions differ, question those who are at variance and contradict one another, and depend on those who merely guess and conjecture,⁷⁶ among whom the one seeking protection would be in a quandary, the one seeking right guidance would be led astray, and the one not endowed with keen understanding would remain in doubt. That would represent the infliction of a grave hardship regarding legal obligation – far be it from God to do such a thing!

Question Concerning the Occultation Related to What We Have Just Stated

If someone were to ask: Since impediments to the fulfillment of the obligations imposed under the Sacred Law on believers endowed with legal capacity can only be removed by someone who upholds legal rulings who has been appointed for them and is distinguished from them by infallibility and perfection, to whom those seeking right guidance may resort and on whose opinion petitioners may rely, and since today the Imam (peace be upon him) is, in your view, in occultation, unreachable, hidden from the Muslim Community, and unattainable, then the impediments to the fulfillment of legally capable believers' obligations under the Sacred Law would therefore remain in place. The existence of an upholder avails not, because he is in a location where the people cannot reach him. So whom, in the present age, should those who desire to do so consult? To whom should seekers turn? On whose opinion should petitioners depend? To whom should those seeking guidance have recourse?

Response: We answer that God (glory be to Him) has removed the impediments to the fulfillment of legally capable believers' legal obligations in this age, just as in earlier times He removed the impediments before the former nations among whom He sent His prophets, even though those nations rejected and terrified the prophets, drove them out, and overpowered and killed many of them. Exalted God sent prophets to them only in order that they might uphold His rulings among them, carry out His commands regarding them, teach their ignorant, alert their negligent, and answer their petitioners, so that those who so desired could have recourse to them and those who sought to do so could learn from them. However, tyrants barred the prophets from doing this, and liars prevented them from completing their task, stopped them from delivering the message, and deprived themselves of their guidance and warnings. By killing their prophets, those nations were like one who turns on himself, blinding his own sight so that he cannot look to the path of salvation and rendering deaf his own ears so that he cannot hear that in which his guidance lies, and then says, "There is no

⁷⁶ Reading *murajjimīn* for *mutarāḥimīn* in the text.

proof of God against me, nor has any guidance from Him reached me." However, as God queries in the Qur'an, "Did we not give him two eyes, a tongue, and lips, and did We not lead him along the two high roads?"⁷⁷ God possesses conclusive proof against mankind, and had He so wished, He could have prevented them from going astray by compulsion and removed them from the paths of legal responsibility and choice by force. Exalted be God, Who is wise in what He has decreed⁷⁸ and clement to those who disobey Him!

In this day and age, God (glory be to Him) has removed the impediments to that which is required by the dictates of justice and wisdom – namely, the appointment of an Imam for mankind. He provided the Imamate, and guided mankind to it, both generally, through the evidence of reason, which testifies that there must be an infallible, perfect Imam in every age, and specifically, through scriptural proof texts transmitted reliably from the Messenger of God, Lord of the generations (God bless him and grant him peace), and the chaste Imams of his progeny (God's blessing be upon them all) that identify the Ruler of this Age⁷⁹ (peace be upon him) with regard to his physical description and genealogy, by which⁸⁰ he may be distinguished from the rest of mankind. However, the oppressors adopted the customs of former nations and followed their ways by planning to destroy the guides sent to them and designing to extinguish the lamps meant to light their way. They sought him out, filled him with fear, and plotted to kill him whenever they found him. Consequently, Exalted God ordered that he conceal himself and also informed him⁸¹ that his state differed from those of all other prophets and Imams who had revealed their identities and been killed by the people. For the interest of the Community, after his forefathers⁸² (God's blessings be upon them), lies exclusively in his acting as their Imam, and no one else besides him can serve their interest in his place. The obligation to answer petitioners no longer obtains for him⁸³ because it is neither safe nor possible for him to do so. Exalted God's proof was established against the oppressors who had been provided the path of guidance and were led to it, but prevented themselves from following it and preferred errancy instead. They were⁸⁴ like one who draws his eyes away from looking toward his best

⁷⁷ Q 90.9.

⁷⁸ Reading *qaḍāhu* for *qaḍā* in the text, for the sake of parallelism with the following phrase: *al-hakīm fīmā qaḍāhu, al-halīm ‘amman ‘aṣāhu*.

⁷⁹ *Şāhib hādhā al-zamān*, usually *Şāhib al-zamān*, "the owner/ruler of the age," a common term for the current Imam and here for the Twelfth Imam.

⁸⁰ Reading *bi-lladhayni* for *bi-lladhīna* in the text.

⁸¹ For *kamā ‘allamahu*, "He also informed him," one might consider the reading *līmā ‘alimahu*, "because of what he knew."

⁸² Reading *ābā’ihī* for *āyātihī* in the text.

⁸³ Reading *saqāṭa ‘anhu* for *saqāṭa ‘anhūm* in the text.

⁸⁴ Reading *fa-kānū* for *fa-kāna* in the text.

interests and blocks his hearing from listening to advice proffered to him, then claims, “Had He so desired, God would have guided me.” God (glory be to Him) stated, concerning a group whose situation was comparable to theirs, “As for Thamūd, We guided them, but they preferred blindness to guidance.”⁸⁵ Exalted be God, Who possesses superior argument and exemplary proof! Despite this, we do not state categorically that no one knows the Imam (peace be upon him) and that no one can reach him. Rather, a group of his devotees may meet with him but conceal and hide the fact of their meeting.

What those who seek guidance must do and what those who solicit advice must rely on today is to have recourse to the jurists among the followers of the Imams (*al-fuqahā’ min shī‘at al-a’imma*), to question them regarding the rulings for legal cases that arise, and to adopt the formal opinions they grant concerning what is lawful and unlawful, for they are the intermediaries (*wasā‘it*) between the subjects and the Ruler of the Age (peace be upon him) and the depositaries (*mustawda‘ūn*) to whom the rulings of the Sacred Law of Islam have been consigned for safekeeping. God would not have permitted His Proof to go into concealment without providing the Community sufficient access to the law of his forefathers (peace be upon them), so that any excuses might be precluded. Recourse to them is not like recourse to those who apply legal analogy (*qiyās*), nor is dependence on their views similar to dependence on the views of those who exercise subjective legal reasoning (*istiḥsān*) and grant opinions on the Sacred Law based on conjecture and surmise. Rather, recourse to them is entails consultation of the scriptural texts that have been consigned to them and that provide knowledge and certainty,⁸⁶ and reliance on the transmitted traditions they have been asked to guard that derive from the formal legal statements of the Truthful Ones and contain knowledge of what seekers urgently desire and petitioners hope to obtain. Whoever takes from this treasure trove has taken from the Imam (God bless him), because these reports are his knowledge and the sayings of his forefathers (God’s blessings and peace be upon them).

Our opponents often object to us, upon hearing us make such a statement: “If you have found the way to the knowledge you need of the legal opinions that have been preserved from the earlier Imams (peace be upon them), then this suffices, allowing you to dispense with the Imam of the Age.”

That opinion is incorrect because those traditions and texts concerning legal rulings are in the possession of people who are not immune from error and forgetfulness and have been heard through the transmission of people who might possibly omit or conceal something. This being the case in their regard, one can only guard against

⁸⁵ Q 41.17.

⁸⁶ The text reads *al-nuṣūṣ mufida li-l-‘ilm wa-l-yaqīn*, which one might emend to *al-nuṣūṣ al-mufida li-l-‘ilm wa-l-yaqīn*.

the occurrence of such errors or omissions on their part through the presence of an infallible figure who stands behind them, witnesses their conditions, and knows their actions. If they err, he will guide them aright. If they forget, he will remind them. If they conceal something, then knowledge of the truth may be known from him rather than from them.

Even though the Imam of the Age (peace be upon him) is concealed from them, so that they do not know his person, he is nevertheless present among them, observing their conditions and taking note of their actions. If they were to depart from what has been transmitted or to stray from the truth, then he would be forced to abandon cautious dissimulation. God (glory be to Him) would reveal him and protect him until he could make the truth clear and establish God's proof against creation.

If it were true that we could do without the Imam regarding things that we have been able to discover by other means, then it would be true that our opponents could do without the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) regarding all the things he conveyed that were known through reason before he conveyed them, but to say such a thing in the absolute would be to abandon Islam and its rulings. What has been presented here in reply to this question is adequate to convey the message and guide those who seek to be led aright – praise be to God.

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A Family Story: Ambiguities of Jewish Identity in Medieval Islam

David J. Wasserstein

1

We can begin at the end. On the night of 31 December 1066, a Saturday, he was drinking with some of the ruler's slaves.¹ One of them quarreled with his servant and ran outside, shouting "The Jew (our source never refers to him by name, but always calls him "the Jew") is betraying our king." People rushed in wanting to kill him. The ruler tried to calm the mob, but to no avail. "The Jew" fled for his life inside the palace, but he was pursued by the populace. He hid in a charcoal cellar, blackening his face, but it did not help. He was found, dragged out and done to death.

For the next day or two, the Muslim inhabitants of Granada, capital of a small independent state in the south-eastern corner of what is now Spain, but was then al-Andalus, conventionally called in English "Islamic Spain," gave themselves over to rioting and slaughtered the entire Jewish population of the city, estimated by contemporaries at some 4,000 souls, seizing vast quantities of their goods and property.²

1 Not, of course, a New Year's Eve celebration: none of the participants in the carousing was a Christian; all used other calendars. The exact date according to the civil calendar of today, though not the day of the week, is uncertain: we have the Islamic date, 10 Ḥafar 459 AH, and the Jewish date, 9 Tevet 4827 AM, but the conversion of such dates to Christian dates almost always leaves an uncertainty of at least one day. However, our sources are unanimous that it was a Saturday (though, leaving aside questions about the Jew's observance of the Sabbath on the previous night, Friday, it is not clear whether the *night* referred to here is that of Friday or Saturday, as a day in both the Islamic and the Jewish calendars begins with the onset of dusk on what for us is the previous day). The Jewish source cited below makes the date, 9 Tevet, coincide with an ancient Jewish tradition of a fast decreed for unknown reasons on that date: "From this [incident] we see that they had pointed prophetically to this very day" (Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, Hebrew text, 57; English translation, 76, with nn. to lines 256, 258–60). The following day, 10 Tevet, is also a fast.

2 For the events described here see especially the *Tibyan*, by a grandson of the ruler in question: there is an English translation by Tibi, *Tibyan Memoirs*, at 75; see 218–19, n. 192 for

Thus at least the view of writers, both Muslim and Jewish, at the time. In fact, there were certainly not 4,000 Jews in Granada in the eleventh century – the entire city could not have had more than 20,000 or so inhabitants – and Jews were never so large a proportion as one fifth of the population of any medieval Islamic city.³ Jewish life in Granada was interrupted, but we find Jews living there again already early in the next century, under the Almoravids, though none functioning there as chief minister to the rulers.

He was just 31 years old.⁴ His wife, the learned and pious daughter of a famous rabbi from North Africa (she had not appealed to him greatly as a mate, “inasmuch as she was a dwarf”), together with his very young son, survived and managed to escape to the safety of Lucena.⁵ A few more Jews also got away.⁶ Like others before and since, the killers understood that their plunder had value: they sold the books that they had stolen and many ended up in the library of a well-known scholar, the rabbi Isaac ibn Albalia, who had been a client of “the Jew.”⁷

The riot can easily be seen, in its unexpectedness and suddenness, its ferocity and thoroughness, its destruction and rapine, its duration and ruthlessness and its sheer bloodletting, as an eerie anticipation of the Christian bestialities in the Rhineland, about a thousand miles to the north, on the way to the First Crusade some 30 years later. Some have seen it also as illustrative of Islamic attitudes towards minorities, Jews in particular. Yet, of course, the character of the riot in Granada, majority Muslims attacking minority Jews, was radically

further detail and more references to the other sources. Also Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 205–10, and, more picturesquely, Ashtor, *Jews of Moslem Spain*, 2:158–94, with notes at 329–35.

³ For city sizes and the share of Jews in their populations in al-Andalus, Islamic Spain, at this time, see Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 191, with references in n. 3.

⁴ His age can be deduced from his own account of his birth date, taken from his father’s “precise records,” obviously made with an eye to a horoscope, at the head of his copy of a collection of his father’s poems. There is a translation at Cole, *Selected Poems of Shmuel ha-Nagid*, 3.

⁵ For the wife (whose name is not given in our sources), see Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, Hebrew text, 57; English translation, 77. For the son, *ibid.*, Heb. text, 60; Eng. trans., 81. It is not clear that they escaped together, though he cannot have been beyond his early teens in 1066. Lucena was at this time part of the Granadan state. Abramson (“From the Works of R. Nissim Gaon,” 52–3), suggests a visit by the bride’s father, R. Nissim Gaon, to Spain for the daughter’s wedding, but, although Cohen (Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, n. 274), calls the suggestion “plausible” as hinting at the date of the wedding, there is no evidence for such a visit.

⁶ Among these, the most well known is Rabbi Isaac ibn Albalia, who later on served al-Mu’tamid of Seville as a court astrologer (*ibid.*, Heb. text, 60; Eng. trans., 80–1).

⁷ For the books, see *ibid.*, Heb. text, 57, 59–60; Eng. trans., 76, 80.

different from what the soldiers of Christ were up to.⁸ And this riot, routinely trotted out by polemicists in the Islamic – Jewish debate of modern times, is in fact cited so often precisely because it is one of only a tiny handful of events of that type in the 1,400-year sweep of Islamic history.

The riot illustrates several features of the possibilities for and limits on Jewish participation in politics in medieval Islam. It shows us something of the ways in which Jews lived among and were perceived by their non-Jewish neighbors in the world of Islam. It tells us about the character of political life and of how political change might be engineered, of the career patterns of governmental officials and the rewards and risks of government service, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, in that society. As a riot with political (though this does not necessarily exclude other) aims it belongs to a fairly restricted class: for good reasons, popular political rioting that achieves its aims is not a major characteristic of medieval Islam.

The setting of this story is one where two worlds clashed: the new world of Islam and the older world of Late Antiquity inherited by the Jews. Gradually new and broadened elites emerged and in the eleventh century the tie between our Jewish vizier and his Muslim sovereign epitomized that regrouping. It is the story of the founding, rise and decline of the new Arab-Islamic world empire, in whose midst a Jewish minority rose to embattled prominence. The anguished ambiguity of Jewish success, so striking, so visible, so delusive, is part of this record. It is a study of a society in motion, and mobility was its essence and its trauma.⁹

2

These issues are not my concern here. This is a family story. The family is that of the central figure in the riot: the murdered vizier Yehoseph b. Samuel b. Joseph ha-Levi Ibn al-Naghila (“Jehoseph the son of Samuel the son of Joseph the Levite, son of the little black/dark woman”). We can identify members of four generations of his family. Between them, they represent very varied types of Jewish existence under Islam. But while different, these are not distinct. They overlap and intersect, and reflect the mobility that I mentioned just a moment ago, the movement between worlds that typified Jewish existence under Islam, what for the German context Fritz Stern labels “anguished

⁸ See, e.g., the works of Robert Chazan on the Jews in the First Crusade.

⁹ This paragraph is deliberately modeled, heavily, on the first paragraph of Stern's *Gold and Iron*.

ambiguity.”¹⁰ If I have chosen the Banu Naghrila as representative of that movement, it is not only because that family, a veritable dynasty, is available for study – such dynasties are rare in the Jewish world of medieval Islam – but because, while an elite family stands out for being elite, its participation in some of those worlds makes it also representative.¹¹ Others moved in similar ways – Christians, for example.¹² And Muslims, in their different ways, moved in at least part of that set of worlds as well.

The family’s history – so far as we can know it – begins with a certain Joseph, who lived in the middle of the tenth century in Merida. Merida lies near the current border between Spain and Portugal, not far distant from Badajoz, but very far away from all the centers of Islamic and Jewish life in medieval al-Andalus. It had traditionally, if, given its location, oddly, been a focus of Christian resistance to Islamic rule, and, possibly because of that, it had not flourished in the ninth and tenth centuries. It is partly to this fact that we should attribute the move by Joseph, sometime in the second half of the tenth century, to the capital, Cordoba. But there was also another reason. Cordoba was at just this time developing not only as a major political metropolis of western Islam but also as the home of a very distinctive Islamic cultural patterning in the western Mediterranean, under the deliberate and active patronage of the second Umayyad caliph there, al-Hakam II al-Mustansir (r. 961–76). In parallel with these developments, and certainly in imitation of them too, a Jewish courtier of the caliph, Ḥasdai b. Shaprut, worked hard to create a lively and fruitful new Jewish cultural center in al-Andalus. Cordoba, as the Islamic capital and as the fount of patronage, was where a signal Jewish identity came into being. We can trace numerous Jewish intellectuals in al-Andalus in this period; virtually all of them are associated in one way or another with the capital, virtually none with anywhere else. Joseph the Jew, like many Muslims and Christians as well in al-Andalus, had good reason to find Cordoba attractive.

Of Joseph we know nothing else – it would be good to know where his family had come to Merida from, and when, but we do not. It would be good to know if there were other Jews there, but we do not. All that we know – if “know” is not too strong a word for it – is that a later Jewish chronicler, Abraham Ibn Daud, writing in Christian Toledo with a very definite set of agenda about Jewish history in Iberia, reports that the ancestors of Isaac Ibn Albalia, whom we have already met, of Samuel ha-Nagid, and of Ibn Daud himself, were among

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹ Among elite families, one thinks instinctively of the family of Moses Maimonides, but there are differences, not least his long (too long?) recorded ancestry.

¹² I have written on this, with special reference to the Iberian context, in “The Caliph’s Earache: Texts, Memory and History in the Formation of an Islamic Society” (forthcoming).

the Jewish nobility of Jerusalem exiled by Titus to Merida following the destruction of the Temple in the first century.¹³ In the same way we do not know the background of the Cordoban Jewish courtier of al-Hakam, Ḥasdai b. Shaprut, whose family home was in Jaen. Neither is an important place, and the origins of these, as of other, Iberian Jews remain a problem. The only other fact that we know about Joseph is that he had two sons. Of the first, Isaac, we know almost less: he was the elder, and he died in 1041, and we know of him because the second son, Samuel, wrote a number of elegies, in Hebrew, on his passing.¹⁴ It is from them that we learn that Isaac was the elder.

The real founder of the family's fortunes, and the person whose career makes it possible for us to know anything at all of the rest, was Joseph's second son, Samuel. Samuel had a quite remarkable career.¹⁵ Born in 993, he was one of those – Muslims, Jews and Christians alike – who had to leave Cordoba in the early part of the eleventh century, when political collapse transformed that city from the bustling metropolis of a western Mediterranean empire into a small and placid town of no political or economic and very little cultural significance. He ended up in Malaga, on the southern coast of the peninsula. There, his knowledge of Arabic and his writing skills brought him to the attention of a vizier of the local ruler in Granada, an illiterate Berber, and subsequently into that ruler's service, where he soon made himself his indispensable principal servant and all-powerful vizier. In medieval Islam, an education in literary arts was a major qualification for a high-level administrative appointment (rather like Greats in Britain until well after the Second World War) – this was a highly bureaucratized and extremely literate society.¹⁶ The story, as told in our sources, has all the attributes of fable, and there is every reason to believe it to be just that. Al-Manṣūr (Heine's Almansor), the dictator of the Iberian caliphal state at the end of the tenth century, was said to have risen in just the same way and with the same success.¹⁷

In both cases we have a rags-to-riches story, one with roots stretching far back into Middle Eastern literary tradition; in both cases we have a striking image of

¹³ Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, index, and especially the note at 138–9. For the agenda, see *ibid.*, *passim*.

¹⁴ They are available in English translation in Cole's *Selected Poems of Shmuel Ha-Nagid*. The date of the death is found in the annotations to the poems by Samuel's son, Yehoseph.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Schirmann, "The Wars of Samuel ha-Nagid"; idem, "Samuel Hannagid: The Man, the Soldier, the Politician"; Wasserstein, "Samuel ibn Naghrila."

¹⁶ This should be understood for what it means: medieval literacy rates were never remotely as high as modern ones, let alone as modern imaginings about modern ones.

¹⁷ See Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, index, and especially 203, 269–72.

the minister of a ruler, raised to prominence by his scribal and administrative qualities, combined with the successful military commander. Such a combination of the pen and the sword, rare in literature, was rarer still in reality, so the occurrence of two genuine characters of this type, within a generation of each other, in the same place, described in such literarizing terms, is all the more striking. But although the story-motif is the same, the specific contexts are not, for two reasons: in the first place, the ruler who was effectively displaced by al-Manṣūr was a fainéant Muslim caliph, and his displacement followed fairly standard patterns for the fates of Islamic dynasties in the Middle Ages: the ruler's grandfather, 'Abd al-Rahmān III al-Nāṣir (r. 912–61), had been a successful political leader, and founder of the family's greatness in the tenth century; his father, al-Ḥakam II al-Muṣṭansīr (r. 961–76), in good *Buddenbrooks* style an intellectual and a lover of books, though at the same time a ruler with ambition and ability to match, had done little more in the political-military sphere than maintain his father's achievements.¹⁸ The grandson, however, Hishām II al-Mu'ayyad (r. 976–1013), succeeded as a child, and was never permitted to assume any role in the running of his state. The takeover by one of his servants was a normal, even a predictable, outcome.

In the case of Samuel, the situation was different: the sovereign whom he relieved of the practical exertion of a ruler was, it is true, a Muslim too, but, as we have seen, he was an illiterate Berber – a fact which gives all the more verisimilitude to the story of how Samuel came to be noticed for his scribal skills. But that Berber and his tribal congeners were in al-Andalus because they were soldiers. It was as soldiers that they had been imported there from North Africa (by al-Manṣūr himself, as it happens), and it was as mercenaries lacking a governmental authority to pay and control them that, in the second and third decades of the eleventh century, they were looking to survive by setting themselves up as independent rulers on the ruins of the caliphal state in the peninsula. This they did by taking over, Mafia-style, the small town of Elvira (famous for a fourth-century Church council) and moving its population to a new site not far away, which they re-named Granada. They made a deal with the inhabitants of the town, giving them protection in return for subjection.¹⁹ The Granadan state was thus founded on the military superiority

¹⁸ For 'Abd al-Rahmān III al-Nāṣir we now have a convenient biography: Fierro, *'Abd al-Rahmān III*; al-Ḥakam still awaits a modern biographer. For the immediate context, see Wasserstein, "The Library of al-Ḥakam II."

¹⁹ For the details, see Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 140–1. The story is dressed up in the principal source, *The Tibyan*, not very surprisingly as it was written by the last ruler of the family.

and ability of its Berber ruling class. But it was never even a major local power, and its principal strength, its Berber soldiery, never seems to have given it the advantage that it should have in the under-militarized states of the time.²⁰ And what any observer of Granadan history in the three quarters of a century of that state's existence notices is the facts that, when the ruler is more or less displaced by his vizier, that vizier is not one of those Berbers, and that, while Granadan armies do play a part in local politics, the Granadan elite soon loses its ostensible *raison d'être*, and, ceasing to be an elite of military skill, becomes, like the rest, merely one of birth.

The other central difference between al-Manṣūr and Samuel – apart from the sizes of the states which they dominated – was their faith. Al-Manṣūr was a Muslim and Samuel a Jew. In the medieval Islamic world, it was normal for rulers to be displaced by their servants, but those servants had to have at least one of two qualities: they had to be soldiers (or at least have the support of the soldiery), and they needed to be Muslims. In the last analysis the former counted more. But a soldier who took over tended to see the advantages of being a Muslim pretty rapidly. In Samuel, we see a non-Muslim and a non-soldier – and although he remained a servant of the ruler, never taking over completely, he remained a Jew. Still more importantly, we see him leading armies of the state, extruding the ruler from precisely that realm that qualified him and his family for their role as rulers in the state, the military.

Samuel served the Zirid dynasty of Granada loyally until his death in 1056, managing the state and leading its armies (and leaving us valuable records of his military activity in his poetry and in the arguments to the poems, added by his son Yehoseph when copying them).²¹ Beyond that, he took an active part in the political intrigues of the court, helping to ensure the succession of the right prince when the time came, and exiling from Granada in the process three leading Jews who had supported the wrong candidate.²² He was far from unique as a Jewish vizier, and others seem to have been active in local politics of the period. Their activity suggests that, while they were often chosen as viziers because they were Jews, hence lacking ethnic or other factional

²⁰ For the Zirids of Granada, see Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 88, n. 13, with further references; Tibi, *Tibyan*, passim. Handler, *The Zirids of Granada*, is unreliable.

²¹ For Muslim views of Samuel (and of his son), see Brann, *Power in the Portrayal*. See also now Alfonso, *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes*. The significance of the arguments is brought out by Schirmann, "Le Dīwān de Šemū'el Hannāgīd."

²² Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, Heb. text, 55–6; Eng. trans., 73–4.

support, they were able also to function as at least unequal partners in the petty politics of these small states.²³

Samuel's active participation in the Islamic worlds of Granada and al-Andalus made possible also a far more powerful oscillation between worlds: it enabled him to play a great role in the Jewish world, itself part of the larger Islamic world, beyond the Iberian Peninsula. The wealth that he acquired enabled him to send financial support to Jewish religious academies (*yeshivot*) as far away as Jerusalem and even Baghdad, to build a large library (we have seen what happened to it after his death), to support students of holy writ at home and abroad, to fund the copying and distribution of the Talmud and other religious texts in various cities all over the Islamic world, and – symbolically important – to send annual gifts of olive oil to the synagogues of Jerusalem. He also, as we have seen, arranged a marriage between his own favorite son, Yehoseph, and the daughter of a prominent rabbi from North Africa, Nissim b. Jacob of Qayrawan (now in Tunisia).

Qayrawan had been the heart of the state founded by the Fatimids at the start of the tenth century, and under their rule had become an important center for cross-Mediterranean trade.²⁴ In 969, the Fatimids had moved east, conquering Egypt, building a new capital for themselves there, Cairo, and using that country as the base for a series of attempts to take over the entire Islamic world. Qayrawan remained under their suzerainty, but the governors whom they left there soon took the opportunity to make themselves independent. The consequences were bad for Tunisia, as Bedouin tribes were sent west from Egypt to punish the locals. Though Qayrawan's glory days were past by Samuel's time, that fact may not have been apparent to contemporaries, and the thriving Jewish community that had existed for a century was still flourishing.²⁵ A marriage alliance between the son of a prominent Jewish courtier from al-Andalus and the daughter of a learned rabbi in North Africa conforms to traditional patterns of Jewish behavior in many times and places, but the Jewish community of Qayrawan will have seen this particular alliance as promising much to them, because of the special character of Samuel Ibn Naghrila's status in both Jewish and Islamic worlds of the time.

²³ The involvement of Jews in the political intrigues of the eleventh century in al-Andalus needs more study.

²⁴ See Dashrawi, *Le califat fatimide au Maghreb*; Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi*; Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids*.

²⁵ See especially Ben-Sasson, *Growth of the Jewish Community*.

Samuel was more, however, than merely a Jew with access to great resources – an Islamic precursor of the court Jew, a Rothschild, or a Monte-fiore, or a Baron Hirsch *avant la lettre*. He also possessed considerable Jewish learning himself. That this is not merely a tribute paid to him by those who wished to benefit from his largesse or to leave him a better reputation even than he deserved we know because we have texts by him and know of others that he wrote that do not survive, dealing with religious topics of various kinds. And – what makes him most attractive to a modern audience – he was a poet. He wrote both religious and secular poems, and is generally regarded as one of the four or five major Jewish poets of the Hebrew renaissance in medieval Iberia.²⁶

At some point, Samuel acquired a title of honor: he was called Samuel ha-Nagid. “Nagid” is a Hebrew word meaning something like “prince.” Our central source for this information, Ibn Daud, is laconic, merely telling us that this happened in the year 4787 AM = 1026–7 CE.²⁷ We learn also that Yehoseph in due course, when he succeeded his father as a vizier to the rulers of Granada, also enjoyed the same title. And following his murder, when his young son Azarya escaped to Lucena, the rabbi who looked after him there, Isaac b. Ghiyat, “wanted to set him up as the head of the community of Lucena and the other communities of Spain, despite the fact that Azarya was still but a lad.”²⁸ This suggests, again, use of the title Nagid. It also raises many questions about the relations of the Jewish of Iberia to each other and to the various states that existed there, as also about what meaning, if any, Jews in other areas might have attached to the title and to its bearers in Iberia.²⁹

Whatever else the title Nagid indicated, however, it certainly indicated something going beyond just the bounds of a reputation in a single small city-state in an isolated south-eastern corner of al-Andalus. Whatever the source of the title – and we are never told who conferred it, what sort of body it came from, where it had any validity that it possessed, what meaning it was supposed to have, whether it was heritable – it certainly meant something special. And that special character has something to do with the Jews of al-Andalus or a broader Jewish world. Another feature of Samuel’s career may be connected with this. He is known to have worked hard to eliminate Qaraism, a

²⁶ English versions of numerous poems by him can be found in the works of Peter Cole cited above.

²⁷ Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, Heb. Text, 5; Eng. trans., 74.

²⁸ Ibid., Heb. text, 60; Eng. trans., 81.

²⁹ See *ibid.*, 74, with references (what, incidentally, does ‘Spain’ here mean? Are we to understand the peninsula as a whole, including Christian Spain?); and for the Egyptian case, Cohen, *Jewish Self-Government in Medieval Egypt*.

Jewish heresy, from Iberia. One of our main sources for this is Ibn Daud, who, again, is himself hostile to Qaraism, but there is no reason to doubt what he tells us about Samuel in this connection. Samuel's activity against Qaraism, and Qaraites in Iberia, signals not only a concern with what he saw as Jewish orthodoxy and Jewish unity in contemporary terms but also a willingness, even a desire, to make the point that he, as a Jewish leader in Iberia, felt himself entitled to define the meaning and the shape of Judaism there in his day.³⁰

That sense of entitlement grew out of the mingling of the Jewish and the Islamic in the life and career of the Jewish prince. As a Jew, Samuel was able to rise in the service of a Muslim ruler, precisely because he was visibly not connected to a dangerous ethnic faction among his subjects – Jews, whatever role they might play in the intrigues of a court, could not form a faction in Islamic polities. Being a Jew thus gave him some advantage, an advantage born of weakness, in the Islamic context. Being a Jew in the service of a Muslim monarch, by the same token, gave him status and potential within the broader Jewish world far outside the mountainous local Granadan world of his home state.

That combination also formed a powerful potential background for trouble. Nevertheless, on each of the occasions when trouble did erupt, it seems to have done so in ways which were quite unexpected and unpredictable in the circumstances of the time. The two principal problems with which Samuel and his son were faced did not represent difficulties common to other Jewish viziers. One of the greatest Islamic scholars of the Iberian eleventh century, Ibn Ḥazm, wrote a pamphlet attacking Samuel. Although the date is not certain, it looks to be fairly early in the lives of both men, probably around the 1030s.³¹ In this work, Ibn Ḥazm accuses Samuel of composing a work criticizing the Qur'an, and even quotes what he alleges to be passages from it. Such an accusation was extremely dangerous in the medieval Islamic world, as it amounted to an accusation of blasphemy against a member of a tolerated minority, an accusation which could bring death to the accused, whether by court decision or by more direct means. While some have seen the work as religious, others see it, more justly, as a political pamphlet, intended to damage Samuel as a member of the political elite of Granada, written by a Muslim who had himself been a failure in local politics. That a Jew in Samuel's position, and with the skills that he is universally agreed to have had, should have written such a text is unlikely in the extreme. Jews in the Middle Ages generally saved their criticisms of Islam

³⁰ See Lasker, "Karaism in Twelfth-Century Spain," and now Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community*.

³¹ The *Radd 'alā Ibn al-Naghila al-Yahūdī*. I am preparing an annotated translation of this work.

for Hebrew, or for Judeo-Arabic – written in Hebrew characters – which could not be read by at least the vast majority of Muslims.³²

Samuel had four children: three sons: Judah, Eliasaf, and Yehoseph, and a daughter, Qasmuna. And Yehoseph in his turn had a son, called Azarya (the name means “God has helped”; in Arabic, *Abū Naṣr* = “Possessed of help/victory”). About Judah, nothing whatever seems to be known beyond his name; of Eliasaf, whose name may indicate that he was the last-born of Samuel’s children (it means “My God has added”), we know very little beyond his date of birth and the fact that he, like Yehoseph, was employed at a very young age by their father to copy his poems;³³ and the daughter is plausibly identified as a woman named Qasmuna who is known only from Islamic sources.

Yehoseph, called by a name that echoed his grandfather’s name Joseph, became his father’s successor. He does not have a very good press. Medieval writers, both Jewish and Muslim, dislike and despise him, even when they note his good qualities, and modern writers have for the most part taken their cue from their predecessors. He is the unworthy son and successor of his father, who appears, not just by comparison, as a paragon in many ways. “[Samuel] spread Torah abroad and died at a ripe old age after having earned four crowns: the crown of Torah [i.e., learning], the crown of power [a reference to his position in the state], the crown of a Levite [scil. priesthood, because of his descent from Levi, here denoting piety], and towering above them all, by dint of good deeds in each of these domains, the crown of a good name . . . His son, R. Joseph ha-Levi the Nagid, succeeded to his post. Of all the fine qualities which his father possessed he lacked but one . . . his father’s humility.”³⁴ Yehoseph was the victim, it is true, of a pogrom, but his behavior, if it did not justify, may be held in some sense to have been the catalyst for it. Unlike his father who was among other things a great poet of whose work much survives, no writing by Yehoseph, apart from a handful of lines of verse and annotations to some of his father’s poems, has reached us.³⁵ And his very name, a (doubtless religiously

³² See Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 199–205; Stroumsa, “From Muslim Heresy to Jewish-Muslim Polemics.”

³³ He was born on Sunday, 23 Marcheshvan 4810 AM = 23 Jumādā I 441 AH = 23 October 1049 CE. The transcribing of his father’s poems began when he was just a little past his sixth birthday; see the boy’s own account of this, translated in Cole, *Selected Poems of Shmuel ha-Nagid*, 73.

³⁴ Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, Heb. text, 56; Eng. trans. 75–6; see also n. 247.

³⁵ For the father’s poetry, see the edition of Sassoon, *Divan R. Shmuel ha-Nagid*; Samuel ha-Nagid, *Dīvān Shemu’el ha-Nagid*; and the English versions in, for example, Peter Cole’s collection cited above, and in his *The Dream of the Poem*, 37–69.

inspired) variant of the biblical Joseph, is unfamiliar and appears ungainly to our modern western eyes.³⁶

Some of the unpopularity is justified. If we are to believe our sources, Yehoseph suffered from not suffering as a child: he was brought up in the lap of luxury and privilege, and became haughty and arrogant as a result. He is said (by Muslim sources of some partiality) to have filled the ranks of Granada's tax-collectors with Jews; and it is even claimed that he wished to dethrone the Berber dynasty that he served and create some sort of Jewish principality in Granada, with himself as ruler. It is difficult to extend credulity thus far, but that such an accusation could be made suggests that Yehoseph at the very least lacked the political acumen, the diplomatic skills and the personal suavity of his father and had made mistakes, and enemies along with them, in the ten years of his active career.

We know little specific about that career, though the publication of the memoirs of the last ruler of Zirid Granada, 'Abd Allāh, no admirer of Yehoseph, has made some information available. It is 'Abd Allāh who tells us in some detail of the murder and the pogrom of which it was part. He also makes reference to the vizier's palace. Frederick Bargebuhr, in two lengthy studies, argued vigorously that we should see the palace in question as lying at the foundation of what is today the palace of the Alhambra.³⁷ He conceded that that structure is somewhat later than the eleventh century. But he suggested that certain elements in its design and in what look like older sections of it could belong to the palace built by Yehoseph and reflect messianic hints in the poetry of Yehoseph's father, Samuel. The suggestion is daring, and has not received much support. Nonetheless, it is extremely attractive, not only to those who wish to see Yehoseph as an arrogant young man who wished to carry out a Jewish coup against his Muslim employer with the help of another Muslim ruler from nearby. This latter idea only has to be uttered to be seen to be absurd, but that Yehoseph should have built a grandiose palace in Granada, whose architecture contained messages reflecting his own and his father's views of their own importance for Jews and for Jewish history, is less absurd, and may also reflect

³⁶ Yehoseph is a linguistically possible, though very unusual, variant of Yosef (= Joseph, meaning “[God] adds,” or “May [God] add”), but in the context here the addition of the second consonant wears the appearance of an allusion to one of the names of God in Hebrew. Another bearer of the same name is the younger contemporary, Yehoseph b. Meir Ibn Muhājir/Shortmeqash, who lived in Seville in the second half of the eleventh century.

³⁷ Bargebuhr, “The Alhambra Palace of the Eleventh Century”; *idem*, *The Alhambra*; a popular exposition of the theory is available also in *idem*, “The Lions of the Alhambra.”

something of a more generalizable interpretation of Jewish existence at this time.

The riot itself in which he died is said to have been brought about by another political tract, this time a poem, written by a Muslim religious ascetic who was horrified by the authority enjoyed by a Jew over Muslims in a Muslim state. Abū Iṣḥāq al-Ilbīrī wrote the poem, which to our eyes reads very like more modern anti-Jewish works, and it was distributed widely in the Granadan kingdom.³⁸ It is unlikely that the poem was the direct cause of the riot, but as Lewis points out, the rise of a Jew above the limits of what Islamic societies traditionally permitted to Jews (and Christians) in political life is certainly reflected in the writing of the poem itself.

Yehoseph had a son, Azarya. As we have seen, at the time of the massacre in Granada, Azarya escaped along with his mother, and made his way to Lucena, a town inhabited only by Jews, where they were looked after by family friends. These latter, recalling the stature of his father and grandfather, wished to make Azarya leader of the Jewish “community of Lucena and the other communities of Spain,” but “except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Psalm 127.1) for he died young.³⁹

Samuel’s daughter is known to us only from Islamic sources.⁴⁰ Her name, Qasmuna, differs in character from those of her male relations. They all had Jewish-Hebrew names, though in an Islamic context they would have used Arabic equivalents for those names – thus Samuel, her father’s name, was rendered as Ismā‘īl, Yosef/Yehoseph as Yūsuf, Azarya as Abū Naṣr, etc.; and Samuel was known, in the Arabic/Islamic fashion, as Abū Ibrāhīm. We know of

³⁸ See Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 206–9; Lewis, “An Ode Against the Jews,” 158–65 and 320–3.

³⁹ Ibn Daud, citing Psalm 127.1 (Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, English trans., 81, has a misprint here: 121.1). We know that Samuel existed; his father must have existed; we know that Yehoseph existed; and about the existence of Azarya, his young son, we have what appear to be independent testimonies. Their combined story – from decently obscure father of a successful son, through the (literally) fabulous rise of that son to effective rule of a state and near-displacement of the ruler, on through his death and the succession of his far less able son, that son’s murder in a popular rising, and the survival of his young son to attempt a return to something of that earlier success (in this case a failure because of his early death) – has a familiar ring: it should do. It is also the story of the rise and fall of the dynasty of the Manṣūrids, as *hājibs* to the third Umayyad caliph Hishām II al-Mu’ayyad, in Cordoba, a generation earlier.

⁴⁰ For Qasmuna, see Nichols, “The Arabic Verses of Qasmūna bint Ismā‘īl Ibn Bagdala”; Bellamy, “Qasmuna the Poetess”; Marín, *Mujeres en al-Ándalus*, 51, 141–2; Wasserstein, “Samuel Ibn Naghrila,” 120–4.

Qasmuna only from Islamic sources, and have no information about a Hebrew version of her name, so it is difficult to know if she even had one; Qasmuna, though Arabic in form, does not appear to be an Arabic equivalent of some Hebrew name.⁴¹ A Jewish-Hebrew name is far from a certainty: such a name was more or less a necessity for a male, for religious reasons; a female would not have faced the same need. If Samuel did not give his daughter a Jewish-Hebrew name, that would fit in with some aspects of what we have seen of his life and the context of his career.

3

One of those aspects is language: it is certain that Samuel and his children used Arabic, in some form, as their language of speech, with each other as with their servants (non-Jews?), their neighbors (Jews and non-Jews) and all those around them (*idem*). Arabic was the world language of the day. More and more it was the most widely spoken language west of China. People either spoke Arabic or felt the need to do so. There is no suggestion that Hebrew was a normal or a common language of speech among Jews in the Middle Ages.⁴² Jews may on occasion have used that language, as some Europeans in early modern (as distinct from medieval) times used Latin, but only, like those later latino-phones, because of the lack of other, more convenient, speech forms.⁴³ If each knew Arabic, each will have used Arabic to speak. This was the norm in their

41 The root of the name, *q.s.m.*, suggests the possibility of a link with the Hebrew word *gesem*, “magic,” “enchantment,” but no more than that. The Arabic root *q.s.m.* does not carry similar connotations.

42 It is a common conceit that Jews are naturally proficient in many languages. It is worth pointing this error out both for its own sake and because there are still some scholars around who should know better. See, for one example, Joaquín Vallvé (of the Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid), “Los judíos en al-Andalus y el Magreb (siglos X–XII),” 450: “El perfecto conocimiento de varias lenguas permitió a muchos judíos ser intérpretes y embajadores de los reyes cristianos y musulmanes.”

43 It is tempting to suppose that travelers like Benjamin of Tudela and, even more so, Petahiah of Ratisbon (Regensburg), in the latter part of the twelfth century, who do not seem to have been traders, may have used Hebrew as a means of communication in the Near East, but both of them came from outside the Islamic *oikoumene* (Tudela had been taken from the Muslims at the start of the twelfth century); the question has not yet been adequately studied. See also Ta-Shma, “On the History of Spoken Hebrew in the Twelfth Century,” 140–1.

societies.⁴⁴ But Arabic was not the only language in their worlds: it is very likely that all of them, like their non-Jewish neighbors, knew and used a form of what is called Romance, which in this context means simply a form of Late Latin in broad use among the population of al-Andalus.⁴⁵ Given the Berber character of their state, some of them may well have been able to use a Berber language with their elite colleagues as well.

This all concerns spoken languages. Jews were part of the societies in which they lived, and spoke the languages of those societies. But they were also part of their own and their surrounding societies in terms of culture. And this involved a different, though overlapping, set of languages. For Muslims in al-Andalus, the only written language was Arabic.⁴⁶ Arabic in written forms was even more of a world language than spoken Arabic. For Christians, the situation was complicated by the inheritance from the pre-Islamic period, but Latin was on the way out by the turn of the millennium, and by the middle of the eleventh century Christians in al-Andalus, like their co-religionists in most other areas of the Arab world, wrote, when they wrote, in Arabic.⁴⁷ Jews were more complicated. Samuel himself is said, admittedly in a late and very (favorably) partisan source, to have composed a poem in which he wrote seven lines, each in a different language – and it is conceivable that he could have done so, even if such a poem does not survive.⁴⁸ But this is clearly, even if it is true, exceptional.

⁴⁴ Wasserstein, “The Language Situation in Al-Andalus.” See also *idem*, “Langues et frontières.”

⁴⁵ To be distinguished, thus, from what is covered by the term Romance in such works as Wright, *Late Latin and Early Romance*. Al-Andalus seems to be unique among the Arab-Islamic territories of the Mediterranean basin in having had two concurrent spoken languages (the case of Berber is different).

⁴⁶ I pass over the dictionary languages that crop up occasionally – Persian, Turkish, Syriac, Latin, Coptic, etc. In any case, these are individual items, they are generally corrupt, and the material that we have for them attests more to ignorance of the languages concerned than understanding or knowledge. See, e.g., Villaverde Amieva, “Towards the Study of the Romance Languages in the *Kitāb al-Musta‘īnī*; Khan, “The Syriac Words in the *Kitāb al-Musta‘īnī* in the Arcadian Library.”

⁴⁷ See Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 234–46; *idem*, “A Latin Lament”; *idem*, “The Christians of al-Andalus.” Collins (“Poetry in Ninth-Century Spain”) shows that there was a small rebirth of Latin culture in Spain under Islam shortly after the conquest. This strangely parallels what happened in the east, with a flourishing Christian life in the Holy Land in the eighth century – in both places there was not only written productivity but also religious building. But in both places it was a false dawn.

⁴⁸ Written Arabic, spoken Arabic, Hebrew, Berber, Romance, Aramaic – only one is lacking: Latin? The number seven arouses suspicion. Poetic macaronism (though not on this

As we have seen, both Samuel and Yehoseph knew and wrote Arabic as well as Hebrew. We have poetry in Hebrew by both, and we also have some verses by each of them in Arabic. Their ability to compose Arabic poetry bespeaks not only linguistic and literary skill, and a specialized education too, but also a degree of assimilation into the literary and social norms of their society which goes rather beyond what we know of virtually all other Jewish poets of the Middle Ages. Of Ibrāhīm Ibn Sahl, born a Jew in Seville, we know that he wrote poetry in Arabic: we have a surviving *dīwān*, or collection, of it – but he converted to Islam while in his teens. We have nothing by him in Hebrew. Of the son of the great Abraham Ibn Ezra, Isaac, like his father a Hebrew poet, and one of rare delicacy, we know that he converted to Islam while a young man – but while we have a short collection of poems under his name written in Hebrew, we have nothing in Arabic. It seems unlikely that either he or Ibn Sahl should have composed poetry in both languages. It was not normal. Judah al-Ḥarīzī, it is true, did write in both languages, as we now know, but that is rare in the extreme, and he came from outside the world of Islam, being born in Toledo nearly a century after its (re-)conquest by Christendom. Samuel and Yehoseph stand out inside the Islamic world for their proficiency in both. The patterning of language use and language choice among Jews paralleled what went on among Muslims.⁴⁹ Muslims did not write poetry in two languages. Nor, generally, did Jews.⁵⁰ Jews generally wrote poetry in Hebrew, for good reasons.⁵¹

Qasmuna stands out in this way too. She wrote poetry, but she wrote it in Arabic, and we know of her entirely and exclusively because of those facts, and still more so because she was a woman. It is for this latter characteristic that she was mentioned in a medieval Arabic biographical dictionary. She possessed skill in games involving the writing of poetry – capping a line or a couplet given to her by her father, for example.⁵² This means that she had an

scale) is attested, for example, of al-Ḥarīzī, a Jewish poet and writer of the thirteenth century, who is said to have written a poem in which each line was half in Hebrew and half in Arabic; see Sadan, “R. Judah al-Ḥarīzī as a Cultural Cross-Roads.” Quite apart from the impressive virtuosity implied by such production, questions of audience and aim seem to arise.

⁴⁹ See Rabin, “Hebrew and Arabic in Medieval Jewish Philosophy.”

⁵⁰ In fact we know of poems by Jews in at least three languages: Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic. These last are very rare, and we do not, I think, have poems in all three languages by a single poet.

⁵¹ Stern, “Arabic Poems by Spanish-Hebrew Poets.”

⁵² Her verses are the only Arabic verses by a Jewess that we have; but they are not otherwise very different from those of other medieval poetesses, or poets, writing in Arabic. Despite the encomia of Nichols (as corrected by Bellamy), Qasmuna is no Sappho.

advanced education in Arabic, including the specialized knowledge and skills called for in the production of verse. How might she have received that? In general, women with these specific qualities were slaves (often of non-Muslim origin), not free women, and in such cases they were usually trained by the merchants who supplied them. When free women in al-Andalus possessed such learning they tended to receive their education from fathers, brothers or husbands. There were few other possibilities. It seems most likely, therefore, that Qasmuna will have received her education from her father or one of her brothers. It is difficult to imagine conditions under which a woman of her rank and background in that society could have received it otherwise.⁵³

Now we also know that Jewish women in al-Andalus could write poetry in Hebrew; the wife of the great Dunash ben Labrat (again, we have no name), in the tenth century, was one such.⁵⁴ But they are decidedly rare. The wife of Dunash is the only one known so far. Both the wife of Dunash and the daughter of Samuel are clearly special cases, because of Dunash and Samuel. We do not know of any Jewish women who composed verse in both tongues. The fact that the daughter of Samuel ha-Nagid, and sister of Yehoseph, wrote her verse in Arabic points tellingly to a high degree of acculturation to Arabic; it hints at the abandonment of Hebrew; it carries with it a suggestion of assimilation to the world of Arabic, and of Islam.⁵⁵

4

There are only two women in our record for this family. If everyone of whom we know in that record is there by the haphazard operation of the survival

53 Marín, *Mujeres en al-Ándalus*, 650–1, citing also Ávila, “Women in Andalusi Biographical Dictionaries.” For education of Jewish women in medieval Islam see especially Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*: 2, 183–5; and for another example, also from an elite family, but dealing with religious not secular education, see Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*, 229 (from the autobiography of a Jewish apostate to Islam).

54 See her one surviving poem (if it is indeed an entire poem) in Cole’s fine translation, *The Dream of the Poem*, 27, with a useful discussion and references at 363–5.

55 It also hints at something else. As Stern points out (“Arabic Poems by Spanish-Hebrew Poets”), Jewish poets tended to write in Hebrew for good, simple, financial reasons: poets needed an income; that income they generally received from patrons; patrons of Jewish poets were almost universally Jews; writing in Hebrew was the way to attract and receive their support. Writing in Arabic would not generally attract the patronage of a Muslim. But Qasmuna did not need patronage. She could afford to write in Arabic. This does not tell us why she did choose that language, but it does help to explain why she might not have needed to write in Hebrew.

of evidence, the work of chance seems greater in both their cases than in at least most of the others. Both of the women are exemplary of the mobility that Jews of Islam lived. They crossed boundaries – geographical, social, cultural, linguistic – with ease. The (significantly un-named) daughter of R. Nissim, married to a not very willing son of Samuel ha-Nagid, functions, like so many other daughters then and later, as cement for a political-social union between two great families, one scholarly, the other more worldly. In the story of that linking, it is only her size that brings her alive on the page, and even then in a passive way. To make that marriage, she had to cross from North Africa to al-Andalus, and to travel to a foreign country – that Tunisia and al-Andalus were both part of the world of Islam is as relevant in this connection as that Scotland and France were both part of the same Christian world for a young woman sent to marry from one country to the other. Her knowledge of Hebrew, and perhaps also Aramaic, both scholarly and literary languages – she is described as not only pious but learned – will have done little to compensate for her ignorance of spoken Berber and Romance: linguistically, she will have lacked at least some of the tools and social aptitudes of those around her. Her difficulties with her husband begin to appear in a broader light. She is mentioned also as a survivor of the massacre, and then, mainly if not entirely, because of her status. As for Qasmuna, we know of her only from Islamic sources and only for activity that shows her crossing boundaries. She crossed social, ethnic and religious boundaries in mixing with Muslim women, in reading poetry in Arabic with them; cultural and linguistic boundaries in writing poetry in that language.

Both of these women are unusual. The rabbi's daughter was able to marry as she did because of the status of the two families. We know of other marriages across state boundaries in that period, but they are generally among the higher elite, royalty and the like, and within al-Andalus itself; even among them it is difficult to find unions involving such great geographical span. The vizier's daughter was not the only Jewess to write poetry, but she is the only one known so far to do so in Arabic – that she could do so reflects the special position of her family. That either could travel across such boundaries, on the other hand, is a product of the new world of Islam in which Jews lived. Others could certainly do much that they did. We cannot imagine Jewish women like them in the Mediterranean basin in the sixth or seventh centuries.

The high culture of Iberian Jewry, represented for us here by Samuel ha-Nagid and his family, is a product of the period between roughly 950 and 1250. This

was so successful, and left so strong an imprint on subsequent Jewish history and self-awareness, that it came in modern times to be labeled (by the German scholar Franz Delitzsch) a Golden Age.⁵⁶ Along with a handful of others – Hellenistic Alexandria, Talmudic Babylonia, the Hassidic world of Eastern Europe, perhaps modern America and Israel – the Golden Age in Spain stands out for creativity and originality. Like most of these others, it also demands attention for its openness to its cultural, social and political environment and its inclusiveness. Its broader context is that provided by the conquests and rule of Islam. Its immediate conditioning contexts include the peculiar character, under a political rather than a religious aspect, of Islam in Spain; the special scholarly style of the Muslim ruler there in the mid-tenth century, al-Ḥakam II al-Muṣṭanṣir, and the even more special status of his courtier Ḥasdai b. Shaprut, the patron saint of this extraordinary renaissance; and the ways, not least linguistic, in which Jewry under classical and medieval Arab Islam was able to benefit from the special openness of that religion and its society.

The background of this Golden Age, however, remains obscure. In 711, at the time of the conquest, there were some Jews in Spain.⁵⁷ Unusually, we know of them from two angles, both of them external. We have some reference to them in Spanish, i.e., Latin, records – chronicles, royal legislation and decisions of church councils; and we hear about them in the Arabic chronicles dealing with the conquest. Alas for any benefits of double exposure, the latter seem to retail little but legend and literary *topoi*, and the former are afflicted by

56 Delitzsch, *Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Poësie*, 44–5. On Franz Delitzsch (who should not be confused with his son Friedrich) see Breuer and Wiese, “Delitzsch, Franz.” The model of the later Spanish Golden Age was presumably chosen deliberately.

57 Apart from the Jews in the tale, the conquest of Spain by the Muslims has many similarities to the Norman conquest of England: a small force lands inconspicuously on the southern coast; there are strong doubts about the legitimacy of the ruler, who has but recently succeeded to, or taken over, the throne; that ruler is away, far up in the north, dealing with a new and unexpected threat from outside the kingdom; he deals with that threat successfully and hears of the newer and still more unexpected threat in the south (though there had been some hints of trouble to come); he rushes down by forced marches to meet the invaders; he goes into battle too soon without resting his soldiery; some of his troops abandon him, because of their connections with the previous ruler and his legitimate issue; he is heavily defeated, dying and disappearing in the battle; the flower of his nobility dies with him, leaving the country conveniently open to conquest by the invaders and the upper levels of society as conveniently empty for the newcomers to take over. The old culture dies. A new culture develops. The only real difference seems to be the absence of Jews in the English story – there were none there before the Normans.

hostility, polemic and possibly also literary rather than narrowly historiographical concerns.

The Christian sources seem to tell us that there were not many Jews and that they were not really Jews by 711 anyway, because they, and their ancestors, had been forcibly converted to Christianity; that they were not trusted by the Christians and that, partly because of this and partly because of the fear that they might operate as a fifth column, they had been enslaved shortly before the conquest. This is hardly glorious. If true, it does not add up to a very impressive picture of Jewish life in Iberia. If it is not true, that suggests that the reality was thinner still.

The Islamic sources ignore all of this – a point which is generally not considered when these sources are studied for their possible value as historical material. Instead they tell us that Jews (without the definite article) in Spain (not because of their position as forced converts, nor as some sort of fifth column, but simply because they were seen by the invaders as a distinct group in the population) were employed by the invading Muslims as auxiliary troops to garrison various towns in the peninsula as they fell, thus leaving the Muslims freer to go ahead and conquer further territory.

The Jews' lack of training and experience, their small numbers, and the contempt in which both Christians and Muslims generally held Jews, are alike also ignored both in the sources and in modern studies of them. All references to Jews in the Christian and the Muslim sources are general and collective; the Jews are an anonymous group and are acted upon, not actors, in the story of the period.⁵⁸ We have nothing from the Jews themselves. There is a gap of some hundreds of years between our last reliable late antique reference to the Jews in Iberia and the first from the Muslim period.⁵⁹

What is the historian to make of all this? Some, Eliyahu Ashtor perhaps above all, have used the sources to construct a colorful picture of the alleged Jewish – Muslim cooperation at this critical juncture in the genesis of what was to become the seedbed of the most important Jewish literary world of the Middle Ages; they have seen here the origins of what is still, especially, used by historians today to speak of *symbiosis*, *convivencia*, living together, as if Spain were really all that different from most other medieval Islamic

58 The "Kawla al-Yahudi," referred to by Suárez Fernández, *Judíos Españoles en la edad media*, 37, as mentioned in the *Akhbār majmū'a*, seems to be a figment of Suárez Fernández's imagination.

59 This is not to say that modern historians have not made much of the material that we have. Given the quantity and the quality of our sources, the amount of scholarly (not to mention popular) writing is huge and it increases year by year.

societies in the ways in which Jews and other minorities lived within the shadow of Islam.⁶⁰ Others, like Edward A. Thompson, have seen the need to repeat edicts for social isolation or conversion of the Jews as indications of the failure of Christianization, and hence as indicators of certainly the strength, possibly also the size, of an otherwise wholly undocumented local Judaism.⁶¹ The overall picture is one in which the great achievements to come are a natural growth from the Jewish community of the Visigothic period, interrupted by the temporary unpleasantness of the obsessive Catholic persecutions of the last century before the arrival of Islam.

This seems to me misconceived. Whatever else we can say about Andalusian Jewry, one thing we cannot claim for it is a millennial continuity with the world of Late Antiquity in Iberia. The only way in which we could claim this is by the assumption of the kind of underground survival of invisible Judaism that Martin Goodman has claimed for other areas (and, it should be said, an earlier period).⁶² But there does not appear to be any way of supporting such an assumption on the basis of what we know about pre-Islamic Spain.

6

Everything that we have suggests that there were very few, if indeed any, Jews in Iberia in 711.⁶³ The only source of any size that tells us about actual Jews in late antique Spain is the *Letter* of Bishop Severus of Minorca, and it relates the conversion of all the Jews of that island (some 540 in number) to Christianity as the result of a miracle as early as 418, three centuries before the conquest.⁶⁴ These Jews seem, from the *Letter*, to have been highly assimilated, with names

60 Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*. What might be called the breathless tendency in this area of historiography is exemplified most strongly and recently by Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*. Ashtor has the advantage of (overall) accuracy.

61 Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*.

62 See, e.g., Goodman, "Jews and Judaism in the Mediterranean Diaspora."

63 The only serious exploration of the western diaspora in this period is Toch, "The Jews in Europe, 500–1050"; he stresses how little we know, and how little there was to know. For the earlier period see now Rajak, "The Jewish Diaspora"; the chapters in the section entitled "The Diaspora, c.235–638," in Katz, ed, *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Vol. 4*, including Rutgers, "The Jews of Italy, c.235–638", and Bradbury, "The Jews of Spain, c.235–638"; there is also a separate chapter by Bowman on "Jews in Byzantium."

64 Severus of Minorca, *Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*. Bradbury argues forcefully and persuasively for the authenticity of the story in the *Letter*, if not therefore for the accuracy of every detail in it. The number 540 is odd: is 540 a special number?

that would not be at all out of place in a Christian environment, cordial relations with their Christian neighbors, and apparently a spoken language that was no different from that of their neighbors.⁶⁵ It would be useful to know more of their knowledge of the languages of the Jewish tradition. Did they pray in Hebrew? If so, did they understand their prayers?⁶⁶ Was real knowledge of Hebrew confined to their educated leadership and, beyond them, to the handful of words that appear in sepulchral formulae, such as *shalom*, *yisrael*, *brakha*, *amen*, and so on?⁶⁷ The scanty evidence from Jewish sources dries up completely at least as early as the fourth to fifth centuries, well before the conversion of the Arian Visigoths to Roman Catholic Christianity. Thereafter all we have is a tiny handful of inscriptions, assigned by Francisco Cantera and José Millás and, with greater circumspection more recently by David Noy, to various periods in the time up to the tenth century. From an examination of them, it seems to me that not a single one can safely be dated to the period between about 500 and the Islamic invasion of 711, and only one – which bears a date that is probably to be interpreted as 919 – to the period (long) after.⁶⁸

Even if their dating were not a problem, these inscriptions would not be of much help. Noy identifies a dozen that he thinks can be placed before the seventh century. Only five of them contain any Hebrew, and of these one is an amulet bearing just a name (*shmuel bar haggai* – in Aramaic form, not Hebrew); a second is an amphora found in Ibiza with what *may* be the letters

65 From the text of the *Letter* we learn, *inter alia*, of Jewish officials – both officials for Jews and officials who happen to have been Jews – but Jewish officials of any kind were dying out very soon after, as can be seen vividly from the pages of Rüpke, *Fasti Sacerdotum*, where the last reference to Jewish officials seems to be in the passage from the third to the fourth Christian centuries, and to reflect cemetery inscriptions (see 331–2). But Rome, still a city of some real importance at that time, is far more likely to have had Jews in any number than the Iberian Peninsula.

66 See for this and related questions my “Language and Prayer among Muslims.”

67 Carlos Del Valle has written recently, “Sobre las lenguas de los judíos en la España visigoda y al-Andalus,” disagreeing with my characterization of the Spanish Jews as knowing virtually nothing of the Jewish tradition and languages. I am not persuaded by his arguments or evidence, though I do agree that the material needs to be looked at carefully.

68 For the inscriptions, see Cantera and Millás, *Las inscripciones hebreicas de España*, nos. 198, 243, 283, 284–6, 287–8, 289, 290; Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, 238–62, nos. 177–88; Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, 474–7, nos. 661–5. There is a good deal of overlap between these three principal collections, but they are not identical, because of new discoveries, differences of definition of period covered, and varying definition of inscriptions themselves.

dalet waw just below one of the handles. Neither of these need have an Iberian provenance. Three in Greek come from a mosaic floor in a single building that may be Jewish, but as Noy says is not necessarily so. Two Latin epitaphs, both placed in the third century or earlier, rather too early for our concern, tell us simply that the deceased was Iudea/Iudeus. Another longer epitaph has the names Isidora, Jona and Axia – nicely mixed linguistically and culturally – but therefore not too helpful about the Jewishness of Jewish life in antique Iberia. A bilingual Latin – Greek epitaph is cut down the middle in such a way that scholars now disagree about whether it is describing a single person in two languages or two different people. One is a bilingual Hebrew and Latin inscription described as of “uncertain nature,” because it is little more than scattered letters, and another is trilingual – but while in Hebrew it says *shalom ‘alyisrael/ ve-‘alenu ve-‘al banenu amen*, the Latin says merely *pax fides*, and the Greek says something that begins either *pi alpha eta* or *gamma alpha eta* and then has a couple of illegible letters.

There remains, in fact, just a single inscription, the famous trilingual one of Tortosa, which is generally assigned to the fifth to sixth centuries (Noy 183 = Cantera and Millás no. 198 = Frey no. 661).⁶⁹ In three languages, with the text varying only slightly, it is the epitaph of a woman of twenty four, Mellosa/Mellasa, daughter of Juda and the Lady (Kyra) Maria, but, as Noy points out, the occurrence of the word *filia* in Greek transliteration points to Latin rather than Greek as the primary text:⁷⁰ the Greek itself is rather crabbed; Kyra Maria has a curious non-Jewish feel to it; and the Hebrew is composed entirely of formulaic language.⁷¹

The evidence of these dozen inscriptions, then, so far as one can derive any useful conclusions from them, points towards linguistic and onomastic assimilation to the Christian speakers of Latin of antique Spain, on the pattern of the *Letter of Severus*, with occasional traces (as in the inscription just cited) of Jewish awareness and possibly also of attempts to keep up with the

69 Grounds for the dating, as distinct from grounds for being unhappy with other datings, seem vague.

70 Tortosa (if that is where the inscription was first used, as distinct from found in the modern period) does not seem to have been part of Byzantine Spain in the fifth or sixth centuries (it is too far north), so we should see any Greek connection here as a product of indirect influence at most.

71 The Hebrew says: “shalom ‘al yisrael/ha-qever ha-ze shel millasa barat r/yehuda u-le-qirā maris. [zekher] tsadeket/livrakha. Nishmata l-hayye ‘oam. Tan[uah]/nafsha bi-tsror ha-hayyim. Amen ken [...]shalom.” Latin: “in nomine Domini. (pentagram) (menorah)/hic est m[e]moria ubi re/quiescit benememoria/Meliosa filia Iudanti et/Cura Maries. Vixit an/[nos vigi]nti et quattuor/cum pace. Amen.” The Greek is less good.

linguistic Joneses in the fashionable matter of Greek – to call any of this knowledge or learning would go beyond the evidence. It is not much.

Christian sources from the century before the Islamic conquest tell us routinely of legal repression, economic oppression, social exclusion, cultural isolation, forcible conversion and enslavement.⁷² Roger Collins speaks about “mutual closeness of Jewish and Christian communities at the local level,” “good neighborliness,” “normal social and possibly family interchange”: there seems to be little if any foundation for such descriptions of Jewish – Christian relations in late Visigothic Spain.⁷³ There may be something to this characterization for the period of, say, the Minorcan affair, but that was the start of the fifth century; the Islamic conquest occurred in the early eighth, 300 years later. We have nothing to suggest that the anti-Jewish measures did not enjoy at least some success. It would be surprising if it were otherwise. Repetition of such edicts need not, with Thompson, point to their failure – in the total absence of other evidence for Jews, and given the reference to Samaritans in some of these laws, we can easily suppose them to be more literary-legal-theoretical in character, or concerned more with internal Christian heresy-hunting, than drafted with an eye to real Jews in the real world of Catholic Visigothic Spain.

Such a view is actually strengthened by the legendary and topical character of the Islamic sources asserting Jewish cooperation with the Muslims in 711: these too do not leave us much with which to build a picture of a Jewish presence of any significance. Any Jews there, under these circumstances, are likely to have been few in number, geographically isolated and cut off from other Jewish communities, culturally depressed, linguistically assimilated, and less interested in preserving a fading Jewish identity than in mere physical survival. The model for this is not, to take an obvious example, the Jews of the former Soviet Union, released to emigration or to feeble and dubious revival a couple of decades ago, but rather the realities of the early medieval world of Christian Western Europe, where a journey of a few hundred miles typically meant an absence of several months, and where the legal niceties of Gregory the Great's *Toleranzpatent* for Jews in Christendom meant little even to churchmen, and the later status of *dhimmī* in classical Islam had yet to be formulated, far less

72 See Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*; Juster, *The Legal Condition of the Jews*; García Iglesias, *Los Judíos en la España Antigua*; Raballo, *The Jews in Visigothic Spain*; Garcia Moreno, *Los Judíos de la España Antigua*; more generally, Linder, ed., *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*.

73 Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain*, 70–1. (It should be said that Collins does know Latin; Arabic, the language of virtually all the sources for the subject he is writing about in this book, is another matter entirely.)

applied, by Muslims who were still only beginning to come into contact with non-Muslims in large numbers.

7

Jewish florescence in al-Andalus, therefore, as in most of the rest of the medieval world, is a product of the presence of Islam.⁷⁴ That larger Jewish world of the Middle Ages was created, defined and enabled by Islam. The conquests of Islam – mainly in the seventh century but in the tenth and eleventh centuries still, with certain setbacks, apparently expanding – set down new frontiers for Jews. Those frontiers enclosed al-Andalus and the frontier lands of India, Morocco, and parts of the Caucasus. They immeasurably enlarged the extent of the physical world of Jewry, bringing together the great populations of eastern Jewry of Iraq and Iran and the fading Jewish communities of the western world, what had been the Roman Empire, and in so doing made the Mediterranean basin a major new focus for Jewish existence. Within these bounds Jews lived and moved, worked and travelled and traded, and spoke and prayed and thought and created and wrote. Jews from al-Andalus, like Muslims from al-Andalus, could trade with Jews and Muslims, and others, in India.⁷⁵ When Hasdai ibn Shaprut, that earlier Jewish patron in Cordoba in the middle of the tenth century, made contact with the kingdom of the Khazars in the Caucasus, he did so in a world where the Khazars lay just over the border of the known: the known was the world of Islam, and the Khazars were a great power just over that border.⁷⁶ But within that border was the known

74 This view is radically at odds with that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who in his luminous memoirs writes: "For me, as a European, and because I am a European, Mohammed intervenes, with uncouth clumsiness, between our thought and Indian doctrines that are very close to it, in such a way as to prevent East and West joining hands, as they might well have done, in harmonious collaboration... The two worlds are closer to each other than either is to the Moslem anachronism. Rational evolution would have been the converse of what actually occurred historically: Islam cut a more civilized world in two... Islam fertilized actuality and sterilized potentiality: it brought about a form of progress which is the reverse of a project" (*Tristes tropiques* [1976], 536–7; for those who doubt the Weightmans' understanding of his French, the original is easily available: *Tristes tropiques* [1955], 472–3).

75 See now Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*.

76 For the Khazars Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars*, remains the classic work; Golden, *Khazar Studies*; Golden, Ben-Shammay and Róna-Tas, eds., *The World of the Khazars*; Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, perhaps overstates its conclusions, but demonstrates the Hebrew knowledge of at least some circles in the

world, far larger than that of Europeans and open to all within.⁷⁷ A Jew from al-Andalus could make such a contact, in what was for him the real world. For someone from Christian Spain, Jew or Christian, the Holy Land was virtually the only place in the eastern Mediterranean with any real geographical meaning. Even Byzantium lay on the edge of fable. For a Jew on the western edge of the Islamic world, the Khazars were a reality.⁷⁸

Geography – the territories of the early Islamic conquests – formed only one foundation of this structure. The societies of classical Islam established the conditions and the contours for Jewish life. Some of these are laid down in the document that came to be known as the *Pact of 'Umar* – though that text is certainly later than the time it pretends to be from, it doubtless reflects what had happened, between Muslims and their subjects, over the first century or so of the Islamic presence in the lands of the Mediterranean.⁷⁹ It projects for us how Jews and Christians lived under the rule of Islam. And, for the Jews, what it shows is how the old repression was swept away by the new rule; how Jews became second-class citizens, along with virtually everyone else; and how this gave them a new, improved status that they were able to exploit to create contacts with each other across the new space of the new world of Islam, from Spain to India. We see this in an apparent growth in Jewish numbers, in the spread of Jewish communities, the rise of Jewish elites, in the participation of Jews, as individuals and as members of interest groups, in the politics of the states where they lived, in their activity as international and local traders, documented for us in the papers of the Cairo Geniza and studied to such effect by S. D. Goitein and his pupils, and in the creation of a new Jewish world culture founded primarily in the new unity conferred by the Arabic language.⁸⁰ It was the emerging civilization of Arab Islam that provided the patterns and concerns of Jewish culture.⁸¹ We have seen this in al-Andalus in the literary activity of Samuel ha-Nagid – and we see something of the price, or the advantage, that went with the mixture of assimilation and attraction, pride and independence, acculturation and dependence that comes out in the fact that his

Khazar society and/or court; Koestler, *The Thirteenth Tribe*, is an entertaining work of popularization but grossly over-stated.

⁷⁷ Non-Muslims were, as they are (with certain exceptions), excluded from the Arabian Peninsula.

⁷⁸ Wasserstein, "The Khazars and the World of Islam."

⁷⁹ See Cohen, "What Was the Pact of 'Umar?."

⁸⁰ For the elites, see Wasserstein, "Jewish Elites in al-Andalus." For the Geniza, see above all Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*.

⁸¹ See, in greater detail, Drory, *Models and Contacts*.

daughter wrote her poetry in Arabic. We think of *Bildung*, and, within certain limits, there is something to the comparison.

8

Yehoseph's fate was very different from that of his father. He died in a pogrom, along with numerous other Jews. His young son escaped, as we have seen, and found refuge in Lucena. He did not survive long enough to inherit the title that his grandfather had earned and his father carried. With him, so far at least as our evidence goes, the story of the family – with all its claims to an ancestry going back to the nobility of Jerusalem in the first century and a levitical genealogy going back far beyond that – comes to an end. In one sense, this suggests that we should see the family in the eleventh century as somehow a failure – *Buddenbrooks*, again, reflected in the life of a single family, or the family Buendía from Gabriel García Márquez. But a single family does not, perhaps, always offer the right lens through which to observe larger historical movement; a single family cannot be an exact reflection of larger historical movement. Or, more correctly, larger historical movements need more than a single family to be seen in their just perspective.

The case of the Banū al-Naghrla prompts different conclusions. We are struck by the total destruction visited on the family and on the other Jews of Granada on that New Year's Eve 1066–7. But two features of that event are significant. First, the pogrom took place only in Granada. Other areas of al-Andalus were spared – Jews who escaped from Granada found refuge in other Iberian cities, even one, like Lucena, under the rule of the same sovereign. Lucena itself, with all its Jews, was spared. If we look at Iberia, at al-Andalus, we do not see the poison passing rapidly from city to city; a comparison with Christian Spain in 1391 demonstrates how easily and how fast such a contagion could spread.⁸² The effect of the pogrom was limited: the family of the vizier was removed from power, but we find both his wife and his son among the survivors. The other victims remain anonymous, and we also hear of some individual named survivors. The plunder was enormous yet, unusually, we actually know what happened to part of it (the vizier's library). We do not hear much about wider effects of the riot. Granada, despite the Nagid and his importance for the Jewish worlds of the time, was perhaps not all that important for those worlds. Secondly, while we should remember that the background, if not

82 MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages*, has an excellent map showing the speed and the directions of the spread of anti-Jewish activity in 1391 in dramatic form.

the proximate cause, of the riot included a vicious anti-Jewish pamphlet by a well-known Muslim scholar and political agitator, Ibn Ḥazm, and an even worse anti-Jewish poem – and poetry was a tried and successful means for spreading political propaganda in the Islamic Middle Ages – nonetheless, this pogrom belongs to an extremely small number of such riots in the history of Islam.⁸³ While anti-Jewish polemic is far from unknown in medieval Islam, Islamic civilization, in the context that counts here – the Christian and Islamic worlds – is singularly lacking in the degradation of the anti-Semitic mob.

There is another feature that we should note. A younger contemporary of the family of Samuel and Yehoseph was a Saragossan, Yūnus b. Ishāq Ibn Baklarish. He is of interest here for several reasons. He was a Jew. He wrote in the service of a Muslim monarch, in his case the ruler of Saragossa at the end of the eleventh century, just before that city fell to the Christians. He wrote a dictionary of medical simples, with parallels in five or six languages. He was one of some half a dozen Jews of intellectual prominence from Saragossa in the eleventh century – we think immediately of the poet Solomon b. Gabirol (who enjoyed the patronage of the elder Nagid, and whose surname, Gabirol, is formed by a combination of a Hebrew word with a Romance diminutive ending), and of the philosopher Bahya b. Paquda. Solomon b. Gabirol was the author of much great poetry, but he is also remembered in the west as the author of the work known as the *Fons Vitae*. This survives in Latin translation, and it was only with the discovery, by the great Solomon Munk in the nineteenth century, of parts of a Hebrew version of the (Judeo-)Arabic original that its true authorship was recovered. Yūnus b. Ishāq Ibn Baklarish is far less well-known than Ibn Gabirol. He is less important in the history of al-Andalus than Ibn Gabirol. But, as with the author of the *Fons Vitae*, and as with the daughter of Samuel ha-Nagid, so too with Ibn Baklarish, their identity is not so easy to determine as what we know of the language(s) of their writings might suggest. All three of them wrote in Arabic. None is identifiable as a Jew on the basis of the Latin *Fons Vitae*, Qasmuna's Arabic verse or Ibn Baklarish's Arabic (and multi-lingual) book of simples: Qasmuna is identifiable as a Jew only because she is explicitly identified as one in our Islamic-Arabic source for her – nothing in her surviving poetry suggests that; *Fons Vitae*, in Latin, has nothing to suggest a Jewish author; and Ibn Baklarish is called Ibn Baklarish al-Isrā'īlī – nothing else about him or his work suggests that.⁸⁴

83 For some common sense on this issue, see, among a large literature, Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*.

84 See Wasserstein, "Ibn Baklarish – Isrā'īlī."

What does all this indicate? Jews and Christians had very different fates under Islam. Christianity was totally submerged by Islam. Its adherents virtually all converted to Islam; the remainder were Arabized, adopting the Arabic of the Muslims as their language of speech and of writing and acquiring Arab ethnicity along the way. If Islam saved the Jews, and Judaism, the manner, and the result, were very different. Jewish life and Jewish culture thrived under Islam – but while they were heavily influenced by Arabic and Islam, they remained separate and different. Some Jews, like most Christians, did convert, but the numbers, and the proportions, seem to have been far lower.⁸⁵ Jews adopted a form of Arabic for their speech and for writing, but both were identifiably Jewish – and functioned thus as boundary markers for both communities.⁸⁶ One could cross over, but only in one direction, not only for legal but for social and good practical reasons too. Jews never, before the modern period, acquired Arab ethnicity or an Arab identity, especially in Arab eyes – nor could they, unlike at least some Christians, have genealogies that meant anything in the broader society. They were part of their society, but a distinct part. For Jews things were subtly different. Beyond the fate of individuals in a riot, the experience of Samuel's family suggests an ambiguity that could never quite escape the challenge of identities.⁸⁷

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⁸⁵ Wasserstein, "Islamisation and the Conversion of the Jews."

⁸⁶ For the spoken forms of Jewish Arabic see especially Blanc, *Communal Dialects in Baghdad*; for the written, Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic*.

⁸⁷ An earlier version of this paper was presented to the seminar of the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton in 2009, during my tenure of a fellowship there. It is a pleasure to record here my thanks for the invitation to be a visitor at the Center during that year and to those at the seminar, in particular Mark Cohen and Andras Hamori, whose comments have helped improve it.

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What Happened in al-Andalus: Minorities in al-Andalus and in Christian Spain

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1

More than half a century ago, historians and men of letters became engaged in a bitter dispute about the identity of Spain, the central issue of which was whether the essence of that identity was preserved by *los Godos*, the Christian Spaniards, particularly of Castile, descendants of the Visigothic invaders of the fifth century and of the Roman inhabitants of ancient Spain; or whether Spanish identity owed much to the Islamic and Jewish presence, despite the suppression of these religions in 1492, 1525, and 1609. This debate in many respects revived disputes that reach far back into the history of Spain. In the 1950s, two opponents of the Franco regime, Americo Castro and Claudio Sánchez-Albónoz, famously battled against one another, the latter adopting what can only be described as a racist viewpoint and the former developing the idea of a society of *convivencia* in which, at least until the later Middle Ages, Jews, Christians, and Muslims learned from one another, even amidst the conflict of wars of *reconquista*.¹ This debate has not receded. Best-selling books such as María Rosa Menocal's spirited *Ornament of the World* have continued to express views close in many ways to those of Castro.² It is no disparagement of Professor Menocal's mastery of Spanish, Hebrew, and Arabic sources to say that her argument is the one we want to hear, a romantic view of the Iberian past that needs to be tested against the evidence.

Like any big generalization, the argument that *convivencia* was a reality can easily be qualified by looking at single examples and at changes over time. Tourist guides extol the Alhambra palaces as a symbol of *convivencia* when in fact they were created by a dynasty that took pride in the staunchly Islamic identity of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada, whose once very influential Jewish population had largely vanished and whose native Christian population had entirely disappeared. Another favorite symbol of *convivencia*, the synagogue

¹ Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*; Sánchez-Albónoz, *España*.

² Menocal, *Ornament of the World*.

of the Tránsito in Toledo, with its rich stucco decorations in the *mudéjar* Arab style, was in fact built at a time when the Jews of Toledo were under great pressure, following attacks on the *judería* during the Black Death; and the appointment of Don Samuel Abulafia as Jewish royal treasurer aroused resentment rather than creating a spirit of *convivencia*. Indeed, it is the sense of displacement among those Jews and Muslims who, in increasing numbers, converted to Christianity, whether out of conviction or under threat, that has attracted the attention of historians of the fifteenth century. Here, too, arguments among historians have raged with a fury that seems to borrow some of its ardor from the debates of the time, as one school of thought has insisted the New Christians were predominantly secret Jews (or Muslims), thereby attracting the attention of the Inquisition; and another school of thought has insisted that they were persecuted not for their beliefs, for they had supposedly abandoned their old religion entirely, but for their race – a view propounded most uncompromisingly by the late Benzion Netanyahu.³

This takes us very forcibly to the question of identities. Did the Jewish *conversos*, or Marranos, generally identify with their ancestral faith, with the Christianity that often rejected them, or with a perhaps muddled set of beliefs that lay somewhere in between Judaism and Christianity? And what about the Moriscos, the tens of thousands of barely converted Moors who lingered, mainly in the kingdom of Valencia, in the sixteenth century? When they performed Moorish dances or wore Moorish clothes – practices the Christian authorities were keen to ban – was this an expression of their Muslim religious identity or might we classify these traits as in some way “ethnic” or cultural? The way into these issues is to look at the different minorities one by one in the history of Spain. By taking a broad view we will be able to see how each of the groups – Christians and Jews under Muslim rule, Jews and Muslims under Christian rule – responded not just to minority status but to the fact of political subjection.

2

Islam made an early and crucial distinction between the pagans, who had no real choice but to abandon their beliefs, and the “Peoples of the Book,” who were to function as a source of taxes to support the conquering Arab armies. At the time Spain was invaded, in 711, these armies were still conscious enough of their Arab identity to treat the newcomers to Islam as clients, *mawālī*, whose

³ Netanyahu, *Origins of the Inquisition*; cf. Beinart, *Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*.

status in some areas remained inferior to that of the Arab elite. To some extent intermarriage between Arabs and Berbers broke this distinction down, as did the dominance of Arabic rather than Berber speech; and later Berber dynasties, including the Nasrids of Granada, deployed every argument to claim that they were ultimately of Arab descent. On the other hand, a powerful sense of tribal identity and a tendency towards marriage with close kin among the leading Arab clans acted as a brake on rapid assimilation. We could say, then, that even around 800 the most conspicuous minority in the Islamic world was the Arab Muslim one; this was especially true of Spain. Interestingly, several leading Christian families in Spain did accept Islam and Arabized themselves, while still retaining pride in their Latin or Visigothic ancestry, as names such as Ibn al-Quti, “son of the Goth,” Ibn Mardanish, “son of Martinus,” Ibn Lubb, that is, “López,” and so on, demonstrate. These families exercised considerable power in the provinces so that one has the sense that the faces of the powerful sometimes remained the same, even when their confessional status shifted.⁴ By around 900 the majority of inhabitants of Islamic Spain had probably become Muslims, but the process had taken 200 years. In Iran, the towns were predominantly Muslim by about 990, but the countryside possibly took another two and a half centuries.⁵ Thus it was not the Christian Mozarabs or the Persian Zoroastrians but the Muslims who were the minority in early Muslim Spain and Iran respectively; when people talk about the “minorities” under early Islam, what they are often referring to is in fact *majorities*.

Historians have debated whether the triumphant Islamic armies were Muslim in any recognizable sense of the term, at least by the time one reaches the westernmost Islamic conquests. One Berber tribe in North Africa is said to have converted to Islam twelve times, accepting the new faith each time an Arab commander entered the area looking for recruits to his armies. The advantages in changing sides were many: they included the chance to win booty, land for pasture, and client status. We can look at the invasion of Spain in 711 as a prime example of what was happening. Armies arrived, predominantly Berber (*Mauri* in the Latin sources) rather than Arab. The Berbers who arrived in al-Andalus appear to have included groups who had long been flirting with Judaism and Christianity. There are references, still much disputed, to a Berber queen in seventh-century North Africa, Kahina, who had possibly embraced Judaism, but who seems in any case to have cast herself in the role of a prophetess. We might ask what is meant here by “Judaism”; the essential point is that the boundaries between the three faiths were very porous at this

⁴ Guichard, *Structures sociales*.

⁵ Following here the arguments of Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*.

stage. Similarly, the process of Islamization was more gradual than the reports of conquering Muslim armies might lead one to assume, notably in the seventh and eighth-century Maghrib. There is evidence there for religious syncretism, as in the case of the Barghawata of western Morocco, with their distinctive Judaized, Christianized, and indeed Berberized, form of Islam. In the Maghrib, the real transformation surely occurred with the rise of the Sunni Almoravids in the eleventh century and, following them, of the radical Almohads who eventually supplanted them.

It is important to remember that the Arab and Berber armies that arrived in Spain were entering a land whose rulers had only adopted the teachings of the Catholic Church 125 years earlier. The unity of Christendom in the western Mediterranean had come slowly, with the Visigothic rulers of Spain abandoning the Arian sect for Roman Catholicism at the end of the sixth century, while pagan practices lingered in the more remote parts of northern Spain maybe until the eleventh century. As fifteenth-century New Christians in Spain, such as Alonso de Cartagena, did not tire of telling their Old Christian rivals, the Visigothic elite from whom the Old Christians claimed descent did not possess quite such a long Catholic pedigree as all that; *los Godos* were descended from Germanic barbarians who became devotees of a heretical sect before they adhered to Rome. So, they asked, were the descendants of the Goths really superior to the descendants of Moses and King David? These accusations gained added force from the knowledge that the Visigoths had persecuted their Jewish population with a vigor unrivalled among the peoples of Late Antiquity, and Jewish support for the Moorish invaders of Spain was recorded by Muslim authors and reported by Christian ones, perhaps aware of this Muslim tradition.

So, when the Moors invaded Spain, a mixture of Muslims, Jews and Christians entered a land inhabited by a mixture of Catholics, Arians, pagans and (severely persecuted) Jews. Indeed, it has been argued several times that the Spanish Jews or *Sephardim* were largely descended not from Palestinian Jews, as they themselves liked to insist ("the exile of Jerusalem that is in Sepharad," according to the prophet Obadiah); the roots of what was to become an extraordinarily successful community are now said to lie among massive Berber conversions to Judaism, followed by large-scale immigration from North Africa in the early centuries of Islamic rule over Spain.⁶ These views are probably overstated, to judge from DNA evidence; but if we are prepared to accept that there was a significant Berber element among the Sephardim this

6 Wexler, *Non-Jewish Origins*; these views are taken to an extreme by Sand, *Invention of the Jewish People*.

only increases our sense that the lines between the religions were not sharply drawn in this period. People moved back and forth between belief systems, which were themselves rapidly developing, as the Christians battled heresy in their midst, as the Jews codified the Oral Law in the academies of Babylonia, and as the Muslims developed their first codes of law in the early decades of Islam. There was an intrinsic attraction to accepting the beliefs of the politically dominant caste, the Arabs, and it is no surprise that mass desertions from Christianity followed the Arab invasions.

The process was rendered easier by the way in which Islam accommodated certain Christian beliefs, so that reverence for the Virgin Mary and for Jesus was perpetuated in Islam, though in quite a different form, and familiar Bible stories resurfaced, though in different terms, in the Qur'ān. But the differences tended to be set to one side. People looked for what was similar rather than different in the rival faiths. In some cases, certainly, social advancement determined conversion from Christianity or Judaism to Islam. While one must certainly not underestimate the importance of belief, not all lay people untrained in theology were as excited by the nature of the Trinity as, we are told, were the stall-keepers in the markets of contemporary Constantinople.

At this point it makes sense to look more closely at what was happening to the subject Christians in Muslim-ruled Spain; they were still a majority, it seems, in the ninth century.⁷ We can begin with a problem of terminology. The word we use to describe this majority is "Mozarabs," "Arabized ones." Thus to call these Christians "Mozarabs" is to insist heavily on their Arabized identity. Yet it is far from clear that all the inhabitants of ninth-century al-Andalus were Arabized. The American scholar Thomas Glick has talked of a "palaeo-Andalusī" phase after the conquest, when continuities from the Roman and Visigothic past were still very marked; he points, for instance, to the lack of change in styles of pottery from the Roman to the Visigothic to the early Islamic period, so that from purely archeological evidence one cannot even see that a series of conquests took place.⁸ We still cannot say for sure whether Christianity was more resilient in town or country; there are good arguments for both alternatives, with some scholars insisting that the old religion was naturally more liable to survive in the conservative countryside, and others pointing to the lack of an institutional structure of bishops and so on that would have enabled it to survive outside the cities. Clearly the result varied from place to place, but it is interesting to apply some comparative evidence: in Iran it was the

⁷ Christys, *Christians in al-Andalus*; Hitchcock, *Mozarabs in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*.

⁸ Glick, *From Muslim Fortress to Christian Castle*; also Boone, *Lost Civilization*.

countryside that long proved the repository of Zoroastrianism, right up to the fourteenth century.⁹

What is striking is that there were Arabized Christians who in the mid-ninth century renounced their Mozarab identity to return to what they saw as a purer Roman-Gothic Christian identity: the Córdoba martyrs.¹⁰ What did Arabization mean? If we are to believe far-away sources from tenth-century Germany, it was not uncommon for elite Christian administrators at the Muslim court in Córdoba to undergo circumcision, and to avoid the consumption of pork, even without accepting Islam. Self-effacing Christians took care not to parade their Christian faith at court, but to make themselves indistinguishable in dress, manners and speech. At a stroke, these acts rendered the Mozarabic Christians of Spain clean, or at least less obviously unclean, for instance in the public baths where circumcision became a visible badge and where even Jews, who were already circumcised, conformed by following the Muslim habit of shaving the pubic and other body hair. This offered opportunities for “networking” when the emir’s ministers were present that would have been more difficult to achieve for those who were visibly distinct from the Muslim elite and formally excluded on these occasions. It also, incidentally, enabled Christians to enjoy illicit sexual relations with Muslim prostitutes, in bathhouses or elsewhere, without being immediately identified.

Clothed or naked, Muslim, Christian, and Jew thus looked much the same. Clothing regulations to separate the unbeliever from the Muslim were applied with little enthusiasm in early al-Andalus, and pragmatism triumphed; such regulations were unworkable in societies where there were massive concentrations, even majorities, of non-Muslims. It is true that the Christians had little contact with their fellow Catholics in Western Europe, including the papacy; but they did have contact with fellow Christians across the Islamic world, sharing books and meeting Christians from as far away as the Holy Land as a result of trade contacts across the great Common Market that the Islamic conquests had created in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Much the same applied to the Jews; ideas, secular and religious, reached the Jews of Spain from as far away as Iraq.

And yet in the mid-ninth century several dozen Christians sought martyrdom after publicly condemning Islam in the mosques and squares of the teeming and increasingly magnificent Umayyad capital of al-Andalus, Córdoba. About 40 Christians were put to death, even though the authorities were sometimes reluctant to execute them, and gave them a chance to recant. The martyrs

9 Choksy, *Conflict and Co-operation*.

10 Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*; Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Medieval Spain*.

of Córdoba were not concerned with the strength of persecution against Christians, but with the opposite: the sheer fact that life had become intolerably *easy* for Christians, who (the martyrs complained) now studied “Chaldean,” that is, Arabic, books instead of the classics of the Christian Fathers, which were in any case only accessible in the poor and remote lands under Christian rule in the far north of Spain. The next generation after those whose parents had read these Arabic books appears to have undergone steady, silent, willing assimilation to Islam. They did not so much convert, an act which implies deliberately stepping across a boundary, as become absorbed by osmosis. Mixed families of Christians and Muslims were common in the age of the Córdoba martyrs, and many of the martyrs were experiencing a sort of psychological identity crisis, choosing a Christian path when one parent had perhaps been Muslim, or when they were in conflict with other close relatives who were assertively Muslim. Many found it important to reassert their Christian identity precisely because they lived in mixed households where they could witness the steady erosion of Christianity. It is likely that Muslim fathers did not interfere in the upbringing of children by Christian mothers, and paid little attention to Christian practices at home; their children were officially Muslim but might practice Christianity. We sometimes find the martyrs of mixed parentage rejecting a Muslim upbringing, accepting Christianity and adopting stridently old-fashioned Visigothic names like Sabigotho and Wistremundus. By retreating behind the walls of monasteries which existed freely enough in the vicinity of Córdoba, they were able to recreate an exclusively Christian environment bounded by the walls of their convent, renouncing their Mozarabic identity in favor of a purified Christian one, and seeing in Islamic rule an expression of the power of the Antichrist.

Nevertheless, it was difficult to cast themselves in the mold of Christian martyrs when persecution was not very noticeable and when the age of miracles appeared to have passed. Colorful tales in the works of contemporary apologists insisted that Christians were abused when they appeared in public with the symbols of their faith, for example priests wearing their vestments during funeral processions. Yet the Christians were still so numerous that the ruler’s court became worried at the effects that the martyrdoms might have on public order. And it proved easy enough to dictate to the bishops and to insist that they should denounce the martyrdoms. The decision of the Umayyad ruler Muḥammad I to expel Christian officials from his court created widespread alarm; indeed, the first true martyr had been Isaac, a secretary at the Umayyad court, as good an example of an assimilated Mozarab as one could hope to find, until he renounced his old life and became for a few years a monk at the convent of Tábanos just outside Córdoba.

Thus the martyrs of Córdoba were the exception that proved the rule. Persecution was rare. On the other hand, this did not mean that acceptance of Mozarabs after they had converted to Islam was necessarily straightforward. The converted courtier Ibn Antonian met with hostility among those who saw him as an interloper into Arab ranks even after he had become a Muslim. Moreover, Christianity in al-Andalus was isolated from the rest of the Catholic world, and it is striking how, in the tenth century, a Mozarabic bishop, Recemundus, had to ask a courtier of the German ruler Otto the Great, Liudprand of Cremona, for a detailed account of what had been happening outside Spain since the late ninth century, because he simply knew nothing of great events beyond the boundaries of Islam. Assimilation in language, culture, religion characterized the Christians of Muslim Spain (though the Jews, as we shall see, reacted rather differently). But among the remnant who stayed firm, there was a pride in the use of an ancient Visigothic law-code and liturgy. Mozarabic identity survived in Toledo even after the city fell into Christian hands in 1085: the Arabized Christians retained their own parishes and churches; their liturgy is recited to this day in the Mozarabic chapel of Toledo cathedral.¹¹ Taking the rest of Spain as a whole, though, the Mozarabs can be seen to have withered away not just under pressure from the Muslims, but under pressure from the papacy and the rulers of Castile-León, who imposed the Roman liturgy across their lands, with that special exception of Toledo. The overall picture is, then, one of relative defenselessness in the face of Islam, which contrasts strongly with the reaction of the Jews.

3

There is plenty of evidence that Jews in al-Andalus and elsewhere did not follow the same path as the Mozarabic Christians in Islamizing themselves. Or, more simply, the Jews Arabized but did not Islamize. Of course there were notable exceptions, especially some figures at the apex of the administration in Spain or in high posts at the courts of Egypt and Iraq who accepted Islam. But the rather open society of Muslim Spain managed to undermine Christianity while, I think, strengthening Judaism. Islam, much more than Christianity, provided a framework within which Judaism could not merely continue, but revive, with Talmudic academies and networks of scholars (and traders) that stretched from Seville to India. Contact with Islam was enormously fruitful: the acquisition of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and

¹¹ Reilly, *Santiago, Saint-Denis and St Peter*.

science; shared problems in the theology of One God, partly arising out of the reading of Aristotle; shared attitudes to the relationship between religious law and everyday life. Not for nothing has Oliver Leaman felt able to write a volume on the twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Maimonides in a series of books on great Arabic philosophers, and Sarah Stroumsa has characterized him as someone even more open to the influence of contemporary Muslims (including the Almohads) than it used to be fashionable to believe.¹² The mystery of why the Jew acculturated but did not assimilate to Islam, as did so many Christians, finds its answer in the existence of this common ground.

Perhaps Christianity was less resilient because in the early Middle Ages it provided a spiritual and ritual framework, but did not provide a detailed code of religious practice to determine conduct hour by hour. Thus the dietary laws were rejected by Christians because under the new dispensation commandments not to eat pork were held to mean figuratively that one should not behave like a pig, rather than that pork was forbidden as food; circumcision should be "of the heart" and not of the flesh. But the effect of this approach was to alter the relationship between religious practice and daily life, and to distance Christianity from the very similar outlook of both Judaism and Islam. Moreover, the rituals of Christianity were to a very large extent conducted in the sacred space of the Church, by priests exercising their holy power to perform sacraments, as, in effect, successors to the *Kohanim* in the Temple. By contrast, Judaism and Islam had no meaningful priesthood, did not regard synagogues and mosques as sacred in the same way as Christians thought of churches, and devolved the conduct of rituals upon the entire community of the faithful, all day and every day, giving sanctity to each act of daily life such as washing and eating.

The first two centuries of Muslim Spain saw some patronage of Jews by the Umayyad rulers. Whether these were mainly the descendants of the much-persecuted Jews of Visigothic Spain, or a new community of Berber Jews who had migrated across the straits, cannot be said. Still, it was a Jew who ensured the arrival at the Umayyad court in the ninth century of the colorful music-master and impresario Ziryab, bringing with him the glittering ceremonial of the 'Abbāsid court at Baghdad, which was itself derived from the courtly practices of the ancient Persian kings; he also brought asparagus, underarm deodorant and bouffant hair styles. The Spanish Jews like the Spanish Muslims shared this cultural dependence on Babylonia-Iraq. This changed as authoritative versions of the key Jewish texts, notably the Babylonian Talmud, were acquired in the tenth century, when the Jewish physician Ḥasdai ibn Shaprut

12 Leaman, *Moses Maimonides*; Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*.

was active at the court of the great Cordoban Caliph, 'Abd al-Rahmān III and his son al-Hakam. Interesting testimony is provided by a Muslim writer, Ṣā'īd al-Andalusī:

Hasdai was the first to open for Spanish Jewry the gates of their science of jurisprudence, chronology and other subjects. Previously, they had recourse to the Jews of Baghdad in order to learn the law of their faith and in order to adjust the calendar and determine the dates of their holidays... He was able to procure through [the Caliph] al-Hakam II the works of the Jews in the East that he desired. Then he taught the Jews of Spain that of which they had previously been ignorant.¹³

Academies were founded in Córdoba, and perpetuated later in such places as Lucena and Granada under the patronage of the Jewish vizier of the Zirid kings, Samuel ibn Naghrila.

This greater cultural autonomy exactly matches developments in Spanish Islam, and the political emancipation of al-Andalus from even the most notional participation in the world of the Baghdad caliphate: in 929 the Umayyad emir of Spain, 'Abd al-Rahmān III, declared himself caliph in Córdoba. Among the Jews, we can observe fierce interest in the structure of the Hebrew language, which even resulted in fisticuffs on the streets of Córdoba between supporters of different philological positions. Such debates about language mirrored those taking place among the Andalusī Muslims. Beginning with Dunash ibn Labrat and his wife, a vibrant Hebrew poetry developed, drawing heavily on Arabic models, notably for its rhyme schemes, but also for part of its subject matter, which included secular love poetry as well as religious verse. Just as Malikite law gained a grip on the Muslims of al-Andalus, Talmudic law gained a grip on the Jews of al-Andalus. The emphasis on lineage, including lines of scholarly tradition (right back to Moses) as well as blood lines, that we see in Abraham ibn Daud's *Book of Tradition* matches what we find among contemporary Muslim writers.¹⁴

Among both Jews and Muslims the emphasis lay on the propagation of mainstream religious practices, based on widely accepted legal authorities. All this confirms the impression that contact with Islam had an enormously fructifying effect on the Jews, in a way that we cannot see happening among the Christians. Andalusī Islam and the Arabic culture of al-Andalus remodeled Judaism in the region. Indeed, the parallels are so close in so many realms, from philosophy to religious law to daily life, that we could think of Andalusī

¹³ Cited from Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 210.

¹⁴ Ibn Daud, *Book of Tradition*.

Judaism as in some respects a mirror image (if you like) of Andalusī Islam, a sort of alternative Islam. Yet whereas among the Mozarabs such proximity to Islam eroded the old religion, among the Jews it actually reinforced it, strengthening observance of the sort of rules that were common to Islam and Judaism such as regular daily prayer and the observance of dietary laws. The Judaism of Spain was molded by the social and intellectual milieu in which it found itself, and was far from immobile or inflexible. It was worldly wise and open to contact with other cultures.

These prosperous and intellectually active communities in Spain, particularly in the lands controlled by the Zirid kings of Granada, experienced rapid decline in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, largely as a result of the conquest of al-Andalus by the Almoravid and Almohad Berbers from Morocco. The Almoravids saw in the prominence of Jews at court one among many signs of the decadence of the Muslim kingdoms in Spain, and imposed a tough tax regime on the Jews, as well as deporting Christians (now seen as allies of the increasingly vigorous Christian kingdoms in the north of Spain). Their successors the Almohads, who followed a distinctive version of Islam, largely rejected the concept of the *dhimmi*, periodically demanding the conversion of Christians and Jews; under their rule Christian life ceased in southern Spain, and most Jews emigrated, many to the north and some, like Maimonides, into the heartlands of the Islamic world. Maimonides' argument that one should not despise or reject Jews who had converted to Islam under threat of severe persecution from the Almohads or from the rulers of Yemen also reveals the influence, paradoxically, of Muslim thinking. He urged these converts to continue with Jewish practices behind closed doors, and insisted that the virtue of performing these acts under threat was even greater than the virtue of those who could perform them openly in a society free from persecution.¹⁵ Here we see a Jew learned in Islamic law taking up and adapting the Muslim concept of *taqiyya*. His position had considerable impact on the behavior of later generations of Spanish Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity, and mostly did not follow the path to martyrdom chosen by many Jews in northern Europe.

4

The third group to consider in a Spanish context is the Muslims who lived in Christian Spain following the Christian advances in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, known as the *mudéjares*. We can begin with the origin of this word,

¹⁵ Maimonides, *Epistles of Maimonides*.

which appears to be derived from a term meaning “domestic animals” – not a very promising sign of toleration. In some respects the treatment of both Jews and Muslims by the Christian conquerors was imitated from the traditions established by the Muslims when they ruled over Jews and Christians. The imposition of a poll-tax and at the same time the existence of promises to respect the free practice of Islam are reminiscent of the imposition under Islam of a poll-tax on subject Christians and the promise of freedom to practice Christianity. And yet there were subtle differences that led to the long-term erosion of the standing of the Muslims in Christian Spain. In the first place, the Muslims had no firm guarantee of the right to live unmolested under Christian rule. Whereas Christianity guaranteed the right of Jews to live in the midst of Christians, at least in the early Middle Ages, and whereas Islam had a place for the Peoples of the Book in its world view, Christianity had no special place in which to accommodate Muslims. The Christian Bible, unsurprisingly, was unilluminating on Islam. It is true that there were references to the descendants of Ishmael in the Bible, which could be used as a starting point, but these were ethnic rather than religious in character, supplying, perhaps, a place for Arabs, *Saraceni*, in one's view of the world, but not for adherents of a religion that seemed at times uncannily close to Christianity, and at other times emphatically distinct. One neat solution was to assimilate the Muslims into the existing category of non-Christians in Muslim society, the Jews. The idea that the Jews were in some sense “owned” by the Christian king was mentioned in town statutes in Christian Aragon as early as 1176, and spread widely across Castile as well. It was expressed in the idea that the Jews were the *servi* or “servants” of the royal fisc or treasury. This idea was extended subsequently to conquered Muslims as well; thus they shared the status of royal servants or *servi*, even though the servitude of the Jews could be seen as a manifestation of divine displeasure with the rebellious Jews, an accusation that had nothing to do with the Muslims. This did not make them, or indeed the Jews, into slaves, it must be stressed; there were many Muslim slaves in Christian Spain, but the real dilemma concerned the status of those who were not slaves. By the late fourteenth century, the Jews and Muslims increasingly shared disabilities such as the wearing of distinctive dress or at least of a badge, prohibitions on the wearing of gold jewelry, and segregation into reserved areas, beginning with the segregation of the Jews in Majorca and of the Muslims in Valencia. On the other hand, the fact that Muslims did serve in Christian armies marked them out from the Jews. The military function of the Muslims, many of whom served in Christian armies, also helped generate a degree of respect for them; fighting Jews were not unknown in Spain, but the general assumption was that Jews were subject to royal protection and were unarmed.

At the time of the major Christian conquests in Spain, however, during the mid-thirteenth century, the solutions to the presence of Muslims in Christian society varied a great deal. At one end of the spectrum we have requirements to pay tribute to the Christians, against a promise that the Muslims would then be free to carry on their day-to-day business as before. We can see this in the surrender of the inhabitants of Minorca to James I of Aragon in 1231, where the Minorcans remained very much in charge of their internal affairs, for the price of a small tribute; they could even forbid Christians and Jews to settle in their midst, which sounds somewhat extraordinary for people who were now subject to a Christian king.¹⁶ Such provisions also applied in the Uxó valley in the Aragonese kingdom of Valencia from 1250 onwards; a Christian church was only built there in 1322, and yet this was no great distance from Valencia itself. Another privilege was the right to travel freely. The guarantee of freedom to travel was valued both because of its economic usefulness and because it gave Muslims a chance to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. The impression is that the “conquest” of Valencia mainly consisted of a series of pacifications, enabling the Christian front line to edge further and further south, but leaving in the rear (dangerously, as it proved) plenty of “enclaves and anomalies.”¹⁷ In fact, one is tempted to suggest that the anomalies were not really anomalies, but the norm. The surrender of al-Azraq to the Christians in 1244/5, and that of Xàtiva around the same time are two of the most remarkable cases, for here we have surrender treaties surviving both in Arabic and in Latin or Castilian.¹⁸ What was in the Arabic text a three-year truce was in the western version an act of submission, and also of partnership. Selling defeat to the Muslims therefore meant not actually saying that it was defeat. Thus Christian prisoners held by the Muslims did not secure automatic right of release when the territory fell into Christian hands; their captors would still be able to demand a ransom before they released the Christian captives.

Yet James I of Aragon (d. 1276) tells us in his autobiography that he was still tempted to rid himself of his Saracen subjects. That was the exasperated reaction to rebellion. He had proclaimed his crusade against Majorca in 1229 as a war against Islam, and the ambivalence in his approach, which later rulers also amply showed, was a further sign of the indeterminate and uneasy position in which subject Muslims found themselves. A classic case of their difficulties is a letter of Peter IV of Aragon from 1364, reproving the Christians of Huesca in Aragon for encouraging their pigs to roam freely in the Muslim

¹⁶ Abulafia, *Mediterranean Emporium*, 65–8.

¹⁷ This phrase is taken from a section heading used by Harvey, *Islamic Spain*.

¹⁸ Burns, Chevedden, and de Epalza, *Negotiating Cultures*.

graveyard, where the pigs were digging up bodies. The monks of Roda could enslave any Muslim woman found sleeping with a Christian, though the crown later limited this by excluding those Muslim women who were accused of sleeping with the monks themselves.¹⁹ Yet the subject Muslims were seen as an important asset, literally part of the royal treasure, along with the Jews. An attack on the *mudéjares* was an attack on the king, comparable to seizing his gold and silver, and the wish to preserve the Muslim communities in the area of densest concentration was made plain by Ferdinand of Aragon's refusal to expel the *mudéjares* of Aragon and Valencia even when he and his wife were busy suppressing those of Castile and Andalusia in 1502–3, after a rebellion in Granada. Indeed, Muslims were encouraged to resettle city quarters abandoned by the Jews in 1492. Demand for the skills of the *mudéjares* remained strong in the building trade; the *mudéjares* of Navarre were appreciated for their military and artisan skills, and those of Valencia played an important part in the local ceramics industry, in the production of sugar and other specialized skills.

This pragmatism was the key to the protection of the *mudéjares* in Spain. Largely leaderless, without the sort of constant representation at court that the Jews possessed, these were depressed and declining communities by the fifteenth century, which no longer posed much of a threat to the Christian civil order, and which had lost most of the special privileges which had been bestowed by the surrender treaties in the period of the reconquest. When the Muslims of Valencia and Aragon were forced to convert in 1525 their difficulties were by no means at an end, even if at first the Inquisition was more interested in Jewish *conversos* and various types of heretic. Thereafter they are known as Moriscos, viewed as ethnically separate even when individual Moriscos protested their devotion to Christianity. Skepticism about this was rife: in many Morisco villages in the kingdom of Valencia, no Christian priest functioned. The Qur'an and codes of *shari'a* law circulated in these communities, often written in Arabic characters but in an Arabized form of Castilian or Catalan known as *aljamiado*.²⁰

The discovery of lead tablets at Sacromonte near Granada on which was recorded a strangely Islamized account of the life of the Virgin Mary caused great excitement around 1600, but to modern scholars it shows how some Moriscos felt the need to build bridges between their old and their new faith, in this case asserting both the truth of Christianity and the special role of the

¹⁹ Boswell, *The Royal Treasure*.

²⁰ Harvey, *Islamic Spain*; and his *Muslims in Spain*.

Arabs as its bearers.²¹ The tablets were part of an attempt to validate the distinctive customs of the Moriscos and to show that they were not intrinsically unchristian; but other views prevailed: fitful attempts to suppress Moorish dress, dancing and other customs had already resulted in a vicious rebellion in the Alpujarras in the late sixteenth century. After that it was perhaps a matter of time before the Crown decided to expel the Moriscos, as it did in the years after 1609. What was extraordinary was the decision to expel people who were officially at least Christians, in some cases priests. The expulsion wreaked havoc with the economy of southeast Spain but – if it was any consolation – the rulers of Spain could at last claim that the whole land was Christian. Or maybe not. There were the secret Jews whose presence was in fact no secret. Let me therefore turn back to the Jews of Spain, and to the emergence of a figure who is in some ways the Jewish parallel to the Morisco: the Marrano.

5

The anti-Jewish violence of 1391 is the appropriate starting point, as it resulted in a wave of conversions across the entire range of Jewish society. Whether or not the majority of conversions were sincere, we are witnessing a very different response to the problem of existing as outcasts in a Christian society to that faced earlier among the Jews of al-Andalus, when they formed part of a Muslim-dominated society. Influenced, without much doubt, by Maimonides' advice to those facing Almohad persecution to pretend to accept the new religion but to practice Judaism in secret, the Jews of late medieval Spain did not in general follow the road to martyrdom pointed out by their co-religionists in Germany and northern France. In other words, it was perhaps now the Muslims under Christian rule who, though declining in number, were better able to hold firm, while the Jews saw their numbers seriously eroded by constant Christian assault and by conversion, culminating in the expulsion of 1492 and the mass conversions in Portugal and Navarre in 1497–8. Whereas in al-Andalus they had been able to create what might be called an "alternative Islam," in Christian Spain the possibility of acculturating without abandoning one's religion was simply not there, at least by the late fourteenth century. The Jews in Christian Spain were unable to create a parallel society that mirrored and derived strength from the majority religion, because the structure of Islam was much closer to and more recognizable to Jews than was the structure of Christianity.

²¹ Harris, *From Muslim to Christian Granada*; Coleman, *Creating Christian Granada*.

Maimonides, it is true, had thought of Christianity as in some respects closer, because of the sharing of the books of the Bible, but in reality this very sharing revealed a deep and irreconcilable gulf between the two competitors for the title of True Israel, the “Old Israel” of the Jews, and the “New Israel” of the Christians. To become Christian meant crossing boundaries that were previously thought impassable: accepting baptism, abandoning circumcision, eating pork, entering a world in which the polluting elements recognized in common by Islam and Judaism were seen merely as figures of speech, as an admonition not to commit sin. Whereas the Jews of al-Andalus had managed to combine Arabic culture openly with Judaism, the Jews of late medieval Spain could only combine Christian and Jewish identities by preserving their Judaism in secret, as Marranos, underground, in fear of the Inquisition, creating an extraordinary mish-mash of the two religions.²²

Just as the Moriscos had drawn on both Christian and Islamic sources in the lead tablets from Granada, the Marranos composed texts that reveal knowledge of both faiths, using Christian translations of the Bible and injecting elements of Christian ceremony into the half-remembered Jewish rituals they tried, at enormous risk, to practice among themselves. In the end, they created sets of beliefs that were neither fully Christian nor fully Jewish. Husbands might lead a publicly Christian life, while their wives kept Judaism alive within the household, passing it down the family line. As among the Moriscos, non-Christian ancestry was regarded as a taint that baptism could not wash clean; the converted Jews of Majorca, the *chuetas*, were kept apart from the rest of society until at least a century ago. By 1650, when Spanish and Portuguese Jews began to declare their faith openly in northern European cities and in parts of Italy, these Marranos were able to switch back and forth between identities, as Catholics in Madrid and as Jews in Amsterdam. They dealt with the problem of their identity by adopting multiple identities.

6

These three groups in medieval Spain, Christians, Jews and Muslims, responded in very different ways to the experience of living under rulers of other religions. For the Jews it was a fact of life that they had no political dominion, so that they recognized at once the need to find an accommodation with Islamic rule, which was for a long time quite benevolent, and which had, as we have seen, a quite overwhelming influence on the evolution of the Jewish communities, strengthening rather than weakening their sense of identity. The early

²² Yovel, *The Other Within*.

Mozarabs responded in quite a different way, assimilating not just into Arabic culture but into Islam. And, as we have seen, the dilemma of the *mudéjares* was different yet again. They were valued as an economic asset, but had to face the dilemma of the impermissibility of living under alien rule, a fact which fundamentally compromised their ability to live as true Muslims. Therefore their religious and political leaders tended to migrate out of Christian territory, either to Muslim Granada (before 1492, thereby strengthening its strongly Muslim identity) or to the Maghrib. And then, after 1525, as Moriscos, they had to live the lie that they were all Christians, when the majority retained an allegiance to Islam.

Put simply, the history of the three communities has as many contrasts as similarities. But it is still an intertwined history. What happened to one group often directly affected policy towards another. As far as we can talk of co-existence, or *convivencia*, we can say that each group experienced it in a very different fashion, and that their experience varied greatly across time and between one part of Iberia and another. This co-existence was accepted as a fact of life, when it was accepted; but when it was rejected the results were drastic. This is a single, intertwined history, and it is time to stop looking at each group in isolation.

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The Samaritan Version of the *Esther* Story

Adam Silverstein

The Biblical *Book of Esther* has attracted the interest of scholars from a number of fields and there are, thus, hundreds if not thousands of books and articles dedicated to nearly every aspect of *Esther*, written from nearly every perspective imaginable. And yet, there is at least one retelling of the *Esther* story that appears to have evaded the attention of those working in the various sub-fields of *Esther* studies. This is a fourteenth century reworking of the *Esther* story by the Samaritan historian Abū al-Faṭḥ ibn Abī al-Ḥasan.¹

That this text has evaded the attention of *Esther* scholars is not difficult to explain: in theory, at least, there should be little reason for such scholars to look for materials relating to *Esther* in Samaritan sources, for the simple reason that the Samaritans are widely known to exclude the Purim festival from their calendar and the *Book of Esther*, on which this festival is said to be based, from their canon.² Despite its low profile, this version of *Esther* is worthy of scholarly attention for reasons that shall become clear in what follows.

1 On him see: “Abu l-Fath ibn Abi l-Hasan” in Crown, Pummer and Tal (eds.), *Companion to Samaritan Studies*, 8; and Levy-Rubin, “Introduction,” (*Continuatio of the Samaritan Chronicle*).

2 The Samaritans do not celebrate Purim as they only observe those festivals that have Pentateuchal sanction (hence, Purim and Hanukka are excluded). That said, John Mills, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, mentions that the Samaritans with whom he stayed celebrated “Purim,” though they celebrated it in the month of Shebat (rather than Adar) and considered this festival to be a commemoration of the Israelites’ deliverance from Pharaoh’s Egypt, under the leadership of Moses (Mills, *Three Months’ Residence at Nablus*, 266ff.). Interestingly, al-Ya’qūbī (*Ta’rīkh*, 1:66) notes that the Jews fast on the tenth of Tēbet (which he refers to by its Islamic equivalent, “Kānūn al-Ākhar”), in commemoration of the deliverance of the Jews from Haman. Bearing in mind that for Muslim authors Haman was one of Pharaoh’s henchmen in Egypt, it is conceivable that Ya’qūbī is confusing the Samaritan’s Purim in Shebat with the Jewish fast on the tenth of Tēbet (which, to Jews, normally commemorates Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem). The existence of a Samaritan “Purim” has been marshaled in support of wide-ranging arguments about the date at which Samaritans and Jews split into separate religions (for which, see Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews*, 137–8).

Before proceeding to Abū al-Fath's text, it is worth pointing out a number of possible links between the *Esther* story itself and the Samaritan community. One is Stephanie Dalley's recent theory that the Purim festival (for which *Esther* is commonly thought to be etiology) has its origins in the Samaritan community of the seventh century BCE.³ A less adventurous theory, proposed by Ran Zadok, has it that the *Esther* story is a record of Samaritan–Jewish rivalry in the fifth century BCE.⁴ The Bible (*Ezra* 4.6) does in fact indicate that the Samaritans (whatever is meant by this in that context) sought to scupper attempts to rebuild the Jewish Temple during the reign of Ahasuerus, at whose court the *Esther* story is set. Another possible connection between *Esther* and the Samaritans comes from J. T. Milik's attempt to identify some fragments discovered at Qumran as being part of an early (pre-Biblical) Aramaic version of *Esther*.⁵ Although Milik's theory has gained few followers, there are various structural similarities between the Qumran text and *Esther*. These include the facts that both are set at the court of Ahasuerus, both include the names of numerous Persian courtiers, and both involve an intrigue at the court in which the protagonist is a Judean from the tribe of Benjamin, amongst other similarities. The two texts are thus somewhat comparable, and the fact that the antagonist in the Qumran story is not "Haman, the Agagite" as in *Esther* but rather a Samaritan (literally: "Cuthaean") is thus all the more noteworthy. In fact, early rabbinic exegetes explained that the scribe "Shimshai," who is named as one of the Samaritan petitioners against the Jews' plan to rebuild the Temple in *Ezra* 4, was none other than Haman's son.⁶ The idea that the Jewish–Samaritan rivalry could be related to the *Esther* story is worth bearing in mind, precisely because this is the backdrop for Abū al-Fath's reworking of the *Esther* story, which now follows.⁷

3 Dalley, *Esther's Revenge at Susa*, 219ff.

4 Zadok, "Historical Background of the Book of Esther," 18–23.

5 Milik, "Modèles Araméens du Livre d'Esther."

6 On all this, see Segal, "Esther and the Essenes."

7 It is perhaps relevant that Ibn Ezra's explanation for the lack of reference to God in *Esther* is that it was feared that other nations would simply replace God's name with the names of their own deities, "as the Samaritans had done in their version of the Bible" (in Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb*, 77). This is almost certainly a reference to the Samaritan Pentateuch, but the possibility that Ibn Ezra was aware of a Samaritan *Esther* along the lines of Abū al-Fath's version should not be dismissed.

Abū al-Faṭḥ's Account⁸

Chapter xxI – King Ahasuerus and the Samaritans; Esther and Yūṣadaq.

After Zoroaster the Magian came king Ahasuerus.⁹ And it was in his day¹⁰ that the Jews rebuilt Aelia, that is Jerusalem, by his command. His vizier was a Jew, very skilled in sorcery, charms and natural magic.¹¹ By these means he won over the heart of the king and provoked him to (attempt to) destroy the Samaritans.¹² When the Samaritans became aware that the vizier sought their destruction, they looked into the matter.¹³ Now, among the Samaritans were two men, Yūma and Yūṣadaq, who went to the king, served him, and he trusted both of them completely.

In the meantime the Great High Priest, the commanders and the counsellors went up to the illustrious Mountain and recommended their intentions to the Creator.¹⁴ They besought the Generous One who does not refuse, and the Good-hearted One who regards nothing as trivial. They had to fast, pray and humble themselves,¹⁵ and they said to their God, “The hearts of kings are in

⁸ The following translation is based on Stenhouse, *Kitāb al-Tarīkh of Abū ʻl-Faṭḥ*, 98–101. Stenhouse's translation is based on an unpublished critical edition of the *Tarīkh* that he produced. Quotes from *Esther* are based on the *jps Hebrew–English TANAKH*.

⁹ “Ahshīrash.” It is of some significance that Abū al-Faṭḥ retains (a version of) the king's Hebrew name, rather than calling him “Xerxes” or, as we might also expect, Artaxerxes (as the LXX of the *Esther* story and most of the later versions based on it state that it was during this king's reign that the events took place).

¹⁰ This echoes the opening words of MT *Esther*: “And it was in the days of Ahasuerus.”

¹¹ Medieval Jewish exegetes (some of whom were contemporaries of Abū al-Faṭḥ's) occasionally suggested that Haman was skilled in astrology and allied arts (this was often, but not always, in relation to Haman's use of lots to determine the date for the destruction of the Jews). On this, see Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb*, 56ff.

¹² The equivalent section in *Esther* includes Haman's accusations against the Jews, accusations that are not inaccurate in their entirety. By contrast, in this text the author avoids even suggesting that there might be an objective reason to dislike the Samaritan community. If the king agreed to persecute them it can only be because he fell under the influence of a Jewish magician.

¹³ The language here is similar to *Esther* 2.23, in which two eunuchs plot to assassinate Ahasuerus and we are told that “The matter was investigated and found to be so.”

¹⁴ As we will see below, this passage is reminiscent of the prayers of Mordecai and Esther, in “Addition ‘C’” to the Greek translations of the *Book of Esther*.

¹⁵ Cf. *Esther* 4.1, where Mordecai – upon hearing about the plot to destroy the Jews – wears sackcloth and ashes, and 4.16, where Esther – who is about to approach the king

your hand and you are able to turn them away from evil actions, as you wish, by your power. You rule over them by your Might and your Authority. By your Will you bring their lying actions and deceit to nought. You prevent their harming your servants who seek and wait upon your Joy. You are able to stop the vizier from seeking what does not find favour with you,¹⁶ and from seeking to do what is abominable to you. You are able to shield us from him, and to prevent his succeeding."

These were they who sought the Gate of Almighty God.

The other two, in the meantime, strove to get the king to delay (acting) and to be patient, and immediately he was not so angry¹⁷ because of them, and Yūma and Yūşadaq said to him, "These are your servants. They are obedient to you. They are guilty of no crime for which they could be blamed.¹⁸ If the king kills them when they are without fault, what excuse will he offer to his (sic!) Lord when he asks him to account for the blood of his servants? And if he slaughters them for no reason, what excuse will he offer for his wrong-doing when he is called to account? O king, consider and ponder: caution will lead you to what you desire; haste, on the other hand, will make you slip and fall.¹⁹ What could induce you, O king, to be responsible before God for the blood of one who is innocent, in whom there is no treachery, and who present their (sic!) deeds and your injustice to him."

When the edge had gone off his anger, and his violent emotion had subsided,²⁰ he abandoned his planned action.²¹ So his vizier plotted with one

uninvited, to intervene on the Jews' behalf – requests that the Jews of Susa fast for three days.

¹⁶ Cf. *Esther* 3.8, where Haman attempts to persuade the king to permit the destruction of the Jews on the grounds that it is not in the king's interest to tolerate their existence. Here, by contrast, it is the protagonists who are using this line of argument.

¹⁷ On the motif of "anger" in the *Book of Esther*, see Segal, "Human Anger and Divine Intervention."

¹⁸ This appears to be an allusion to the accusation against the Samaritans raised by the Jewish vizier. As with Haman's accusation against the Jews, the charge here seems to be that the Samaritans are disobedient.

¹⁹ Lit. "lead to failure and sin."

²⁰ Cf. *Esther* 2.1, "When the anger of the king Ahasuerus subsided."

²¹ Ostensibly, this should be the end of the story as the Samaritans are saved. What follows, however, is a version of "the eunuchs" plot against the king' (*Esther* 2.21–3), the significance of which will be discussed below. Note a crucial disanalogy with the Biblical story: here, the king is able to reverse the decree against the nation under threat; in *Esther*, however, the king's decree cannot be overturned and a separate one must be issued in time to neutralize the threat from Haman.

of his servants to kill him. Yūşadaq got to hear of this and told the consort (Ar. *zawja*) of the king about it. Her name was Esther. When she learnt about this she informed the king,²² who had the truth of the matter looked into and had the servant put to death. The vizier became very embittered by the death of the servant, and his hatred for them increased. So he set about looking for (other) means of having them destroyed. Yūşadaq meanwhile had won the hearts of the king's subjects.²³ He attracted them to himself by his soft words and his kindness. He convinced them that he wished them well,²⁴ by the purity of his intentions, by his greatness of soul and sublime zeal. He never set aside this gentle manner, even in his efforts to blot out all traces²⁵ of the intrigue which the king's vizier had nurtured in his heart, with the result that God granted his people a happy release from Ahasuerus and his insolence.²⁶

Analysis

On the face of it, this passage appears to be a blatant attempt to reverse the *Esther* story, by transforming the Jews from being the protagonists that they are in *Esther* to being the story's antagonists. That the author begins by placing the events at the court of Ahasuerus and adds that "it was in his day that the Jews rebuilt Aelia, that is Jerusalem, by his command," increases the likelihood of a connection to the Jewish–Samaritan rivalry referred to in *Ezra 4*. Certainly the *Book of Esther* itself has nothing to say about the rebuilding of the Temple,

²² Cf. *Esther* 2.22, where Mordecai specifically relays the intelligence about the eunuchs' plot to the king via Esther.

²³ In *Esther* (6.1), too, Mordecai is seen to be celebrated publicly in Susa (being led by Haman) even before the plot against the Jews was neutralized. Stylistically, however, it is with *Esther* 8.15 ("Mordecai left the king's presence . . . and the city of Susa rang with joyous cries") and 9.3 ("Indeed, all the officials of the provinces – the satraps, the governors, and the king's stewards – showed deference to the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them") that this line is comparable.

²⁴ Cf. *Esther* 10.3, where Mordecai is described as "seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his seed."

²⁵ Cf. *Exodus* 17.14 ("I will blot out the memory of Amaleq") and *Deuteronomy* 25.19 ("you shall blot out the memory of Amaleq"). Haman was widely viewed as being an "Amaleqite" in Jewish exegetical works, from as early as Josephus (*Antiquities*, 11:5) onwards.

²⁶ As with *Esther* (ch. 10), the Samaritan version of the story ends with praise for the leading male character (with no reference to Esther's role in the events). Admittedly, this makes sense in the Samaritan account as Esther's contribution to the events is very minor indeed (she transmits Mordecai's news about the assassination plot to the king).

an omission to which scholars have drawn attention.²⁷ And if, as suggested above, some Jews in the Second Temple period equated the antagonists of the *Esther*-type story found at Qumran with the Samaritans (rather than with the expected Amalekites), then Abū al-Fath's version also transforms the status of the Samaritans from antagonists to protagonists. Accordingly, the evil vizier in this version is not Haman but an unnamed Jew, and the nation threatened by this evil vizier is not the Jews but the Samaritans.

Abū al-Fath's account, however, does not simply reverse the relationship between the Jews and their enemies and there are also a number of ways in which his version of the story differs structurally from the Biblical one. The Mordecai character of *Esther*, for instance, is split into two Samaritans (Yūma and Yūṣadaq), while the Esther character of the Bible's version – though she retains her name, as does Ahasuerus, in Abū al-Fath's reworking of the story – is but a minor character, whose only role is to relay information about an assassination plot to the king. Similarly, in the Samaritan version Esther is not “the Queen” that she is in *Esther* but a simple consort or wife (*zawja*). While this latter detail might appear to support Elias Bickerman's theory that the Biblical *Esther* was based on an earlier story whose heroine was a concubine,²⁸ it is more likely that it is a result of the more general downgrading of Esther's character in the Samaritan story, perhaps due to reluctance on the part of a socially conservative Samaritan author to highlight the role of a woman in delivering his nation from annihilation.

Another difference between the Biblical and Samaritan versions of the story may be seen in the roles played by various members of each community in the respective versions of the story. In the Biblical version, Mordecai and Esther are court-Jews: Mordecai gains his position through his wisdom, Esther through her beauty. They are portrayed as never being far from the corridors of power, with Mordecai “sitting at the king's gate” (*Esther* 2.19)²⁹ and Esther living in the royal palace. In addition to their “political” roles, however, in the Biblical story they are also “spiritual” leaders of the community, who institute fasts (*Esther* 4.16), make grandiose mourning gestures publicly (*Esther* 4.1), and even institute a religious festival (and perhaps also a fast day) to be observed by Jews in perpetuity (*Esther* 9.20–3, 29–32). Mordecai's – and to a lesser extent, Esther's – role as “spiritual” leader of the Jewish community in the Masoretic Text (MT) of *Esther* is complemented by the Greek versions of *Esther* (in which the religious elements of the story are not concealed), which describe Mordecai and Esther praying for the Jews' salvation (Addition “C”).

²⁷ E.g., Levenson, *Esther*, 14f.

²⁸ Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible*, 184.

²⁹ See also *Esther* 3.2; 4.2; 5.9; and so on.

By contrast, in the Samaritan story, whereas the “political” roles are reserved for the Mordecai characters Yūma and Yūṣadaq, the public prayer is undertaken by “the Great High Priest, the commanders and the counsellors.”

The setting of this public prayer service in Abū al-Fath’s version alludes to yet another major distinction between the two stories, namely that whereas the Biblical *Esther* is seen as a prototypical “Diaspora story,” set in a foreign court, unconcerned with events in the Holy Land or with the Temple, the Samaritan version does not seem to take place in “exile” at all and the prayer for the Samaritan community is held at “the illustrious Mountain,” that is Mount Gerizim. Thus, whereas *Esther* is normally taken to be either etiology for the Purim festival or an historical novella demonstrating the heights to which a Jew (or Jews more generally) can rise at the court of a foreign king, the Samaritan version of the story seems to have no significance for the Samaritan community, other than as an anti-Jewish polemic.

It is perhaps the crudeness of Abū al-Fath’s polemical version that led a later Samaritan writer, who is generally thought to have read Abū al-Fath’s work,³⁰ to recast the Samaritan version of the *Esther* story by blending it with the Biblical one, thereby reconciling the Jewish and Samaritan takes on history. The author of the eighteenth century *Chronicle Adler* places the episode during the high priesthood of Hananiah, saying:

In the days of his priesthood, there were two men, princes of the sons of Joseph, which is the community of the Observers. The name of one was Jomakim and the name of the other was Jehozadok; both were possessed of very great wisdom and understanding. And the community of the Observers sent the two aforementioned princes, by the command of the High Priest Hananiah, to serve the king of Babylonia. Accordingly, they went and served him, and he delighted in them, and his heart was inclined towards them. In those days, Esther, one of the daughters of Judah, became the wife of the king of Assyria who loved her very dearly. He also had for his viceroy a man of the community of the Jews whose name was Mordecai, Esther, the wife of the king at that time, being his niece. They did many favours to the community of the Jews who resided in the land of Canaan.³¹

³⁰ It appears from internal evidence that *Chronicle Adler* is a composite work, whose earliest sources are much more ancient than the eighteenth century, to which later authors added subsequent materials.

³¹ Based on Bowman, *Samaritan Documents*, 103. The statement that Esther and Mordecai “did many favours” to the Jews of Canaan is probably a reference to the Jewish–Samaritan rivalry covered in *Ezra* 4.

This author's tone is considerably more conciliatory than Abū al-Fath's. He recognizes that Esther and Mordecai were Jews (or "Judeans") and that they served the interests of the Jewish community at the time, through Esther's marriage to the Babylonian king and Mordecai's high position at the Babylonian court. Rather than depicting a Jewish–Samaritan rivalry, this author is happy to accept that contemporaneous with Esther and Mordecai were Jomakim and Jehozadok (Abū al-Fath's Yūma and Yūṣadaq),³² who found favor with the king of Assyria by virtue of their wisdom (recalling Mordecai of the *Esther* story).³³ Thus, although this author does not actually recount the *Esther* story, it is clear from the information he provides that he rejects Abū al-Fath's version of events and there is in fact little evidence that the latter version was influential in Samaritan circles.³⁴

The “Plot of the Eunuchs” in the Two Versions

In terms of the respective accounts' literary structures, the most significant difference between Abū al-Fath's account and the Biblical story is the contextual placement of a deceptively important three-verse episode from the *Book of Esther*, an episode commonly known as “the plot of the eunuchs.” Preceding this episode are descriptions of King Ahasuerus's empire and its grandeur, of the king's indecision and reliance on the advice of others, and of the deposing of his first queen, Vashti, at the insistence of one of his advisors. In the first twenty verses of chapter two, we are then introduced to the two protagonists, Mordecai and Esther, the former being a functionary of sorts at the court of the king, the latter an orphan Jewess who was raised by Mordecai her cousin. We are then told of the beauty pageant held throughout the empire aimed at finding a new wife for Ahasuerus, which Esther won. Rather abruptly, the author then turns to a description of the plot of the eunuchs (*Esther* 2.21–3), as follows:

³² These are clearly Joiakim (cf. *Nehemiah* 12.10) and Jehozadak (cf. *1 Chronicles* 6.15). In his endnotes to this passage Bowman (*Samaritan Documents*, 114 n. 133) says: “It is characteristic of Samaritan historical methods that the Samaritans should claim the credit of sending Jehozadok (sic!) to Babylon!”

³³ On this, see Talmon, “Wisdom in the Book of Esther.”

³⁴ As stated above (n. 2), whatever Samaritan Purim does appear to exist makes no reference to the events recounted in Abū al-Fath's text.

At that time, when Mordecai was sitting in the palace gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry, and plotted to do away with King Ahasuerus. Mordecai learned of it and told it to Queen Esther, and Esther reported it to the king in Mordecai's name. The matter was investigated and found to be so, and the two were impaled on stakes. This was recorded in the book of annals at the insistence of the king.

This passage ends chapter two and we are immediately, at the start of chapter three, introduced to the villainous courtier Haman, whom the king elevated to be his second in command. The king insisted that all other courtiers bow before Haman, an order that all obeyed, except for Mordecai, who explained that his status as a Jew prevented him from complying (though, as we shall see below, it is not entirely clear why Mordecai thought this to be so). Haman was thus determined to have Mordecai and all other Jews of the empire killed. Mordecai and Esther eventually managed to have the threat against the Jews averted, Haman and his sons were killed, Mordecai replaced Haman as second in command at Ahasuerus's court, and the Jews of the empire and their allies celebrated in a manner that set the precedent for Purim.

Within this overview, the only detail worth mentioning is that the description of the gradual reversal of Haman and Mordecai's respective fortunes includes an episode in which the king, unable to sleep, had his "book of annals" read to him as a sort of bedtime story (*Esther* 6.1ff.). The entry that happened to be chosen was the account of Mordecai's foiling the eunuchs' plot to assassinate the king. Mordecai is then publicly rewarded and Haman humiliated.

The point here is that although the "plot of the eunuchs" is important in establishing Mordecai as an asset to the king, and demonstrates for the first time how Mordecai and Esther cooperate constructively (foreshadowing their much larger project of saving the Jews which was to follow), this episode in *Esther* is not absolutely crucial to the story: without it, Haman would still seek to kill Mordecai and the Jews and Mordecai and Esther would still have to save them.

From ancient to modern times exegetes have thus debated the episode's relevance to the wider story.³⁵ Many of those who use the MT version of *Esther* have argued that the placement of these verses immediately before Ahasuerus

35 Naturally, as most ancient commentators considered the story to be historical fact, none doubted that the plot of the eunuchs happened as described. The question was, why is it being recounted here and not at the start of chapter six, where its relevance to the story is manifest?

elevates Haman and orders that all courtiers (including Mordecai) show him respect, is the missing clue to the episode's significance. In their view, Mordecai refused to bow to Haman as he felt resentful of the fact that Haman was the one being elevated (for no apparent reason) whereas it was Mordecai who had just saved the king's life. If anything, it should be Haman and the other courtiers who bow before Mordecai. A related theory has it that the placement of these verses is indeed telling and that Mordecai refused to bow to Haman not because he felt the honor should go to him but rather because he knew that Haman was behind the plot to assassinate the king (with the aim of becoming king himself). Haman's designs on Ahasuerus's throne are repeatedly described in Jewish exegetical works from antiquity onwards. In either case, Mordecai's role in foiling the eunuchs' plot is thought to be related to Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman, but it is unrelated to Haman's rage against Mordecai and the Jewish people.³⁶

By contrast, in Abū al-Fath's version, there are *two* threats to the Samaritan people: in the first, where an evil Jewish vizier simply decided to slander the Samaritans and to use his influence at the court to have them killed; in the second, when the vizier's plan failed he sought to have Ahasuerus assassinated. This plot too was frustrated and the vizier's co-conspirator was executed, which incensed the vizier so much that he sought once again to destroy the Samaritans (as it was the Samaritan Yūṣadaq who uncovered the plot). Thus, in Abū al-Fath's account, the attempt on Ahasuerus's life is crucial to one of the two threats to the Samaritan people. If Abū al-Fath was merely seeking to reverse the Jewish version of history by portraying the villain as a Jew and the protagonists as Samaritans, why then did he make such a significant change to the Biblical version of the *Esther* story by re-configuring the "plot of the eunuchs" in this way?

To answer this question we must turn away from the MT and towards the Greek versions of *Esther*, which date from no later than the first century BCE and whose influence is already apparent in Josephus' retelling of the *Esther* story. Support for the fact that Abū al-Fath was using a Greek version of *Esther* (or an Arabic one based on it) can already be seen in the inclusion of the Samaritan priests' prayers for deliverance from the threat posed by the Jewish vizier: as noted above, while the MT version of *Esther* has nothing of this sort, the Greek versions include prayers by Mordecai and Esther in Addition "C." Similarly, Abū al-Fath's description of the assassination attempt against

³⁶ Another interpretation is that Mordecai's role in foiling the plot establishes him as a loyal courtier, so that the reader does not suspect simple disloyalty on his part in the following verses where he does not bow to Haman despite the fact that the king ordered it.

Ahasuerus and its consequences can be elucidated with reference to the plot of the eunuchs in the Greek versions of *Esther*. In one of the Greek versions (the Alpha Text), this episode appears not at the end of chapter two but in Addition “A” to the text, which precedes chapter one of the book (and thus provides some background information to the story that then unfolds along lines similar to those in MT *Esther*). There we are told the following regarding two eunuchs at the king’s court:

[Mordecai] overheard their words and their schemes as they were plotting to assault Ahasuerus, the king, to kill him. So after thinking about it, Mordecai reported about them. Then the king questioned the two eunuchs and found Mordecai’s words true, and when the eunuchs confessed they were led away. So Ahasuerus the king wrote about these things and Mordecai was written about in the book of the king so that these things would be remembered. And the king commanded concerning Mordecai that he serve in the court of the king and conspicuously guard every door. And he assigned to him for these things Haman, the son of Hamedathos, a Macedonian in the presence of the king. And Haman was seeking to harm Mordecai and all his people because of what he had said to the king concerning the eunuchs, because they had been executed. (vv.12–18)³⁷

The LXX’s version of the plot of the eunuchs is almost identical to that of the Alpha Text, and accordingly v.17 of Addition “A” in the LXX states that Haman “sought to harm Mordecai and his people because of the two eunuchs of the king.” Confusingly, unlike the Alpha Text, which cut and pasted the episode from chapter two of *Esther* into Addition “A,”³⁸ the LXX includes another version of the eunuchs’ plot at the end of chapter two, a version that is almost identical to the MT’s account of this episode and thus includes the crucial detail that when Mordecai uncovered the plot he relayed the information to the king via Esther. Abū al-Faṭḥ, in weaving into his account the fact that

³⁷ The translation is based on Jobes, “Esther,” 424–40. (I have changed the Greek names “Assyeros” and “Mardochaios” back into “Ahasuerus” and “Mordecai.”)

³⁸ Of course, the relative dating of the Greek versions and the MT respectively is the subject of an inconclusive debate and there is considerable evidence in favor of the argument that the Alpha-Text is based on an earlier version of the story than that of either the LXX or the MT. Still, the point remains that the Alpha-Text has the entire episode in one place (Addition “A”), the MT has it in another (the end of chapter two), while the LXX has it repeated with slightly different details in both Addition “A” and at the end of chapter two.

the protagonist and his nation were threatened for his having uncovered the assassination plot, and in including the detail that the protagonist informed Ahasuerus of this plot via Esther, must therefore have been using the LXX version of *Esther* or another retelling of the story based on the LXX.

One such LXX-based retelling of *Esther* is the tenth century *Sefer Yosippon*, whose author recounts the *Esther* story, albeit in a version that bears little resemblance to the MT text. *Sefer Yosippon* barely dwells on the plot of the *Esther* story at all, focusing instead on a detailed repetition of the prayers of Mordecai and Esther (just as Abū al-Fath gives pride of place to the Samaritan priests' prayers). Also in common with Abū al-Fath's version of *Esther* is *Sefer Yosippon's* assertion that Haman resolved to kill Mordecai and the Jews in revenge for Mordecai's having unraveled the eunuch's plot against the king, as well as the curious detail that Haman "stole king Ahasuerus's heart," which is almost identical to Abū al-Fath's statement that the evil Jewish vizier in his account "won over the heart of the king."³⁹ This is not to suggest that Abū al-Fath used *Sefer Yosippon's* text but that – the substitution of a Jewish vizier for Haman, and the Samaritans for the Jews aside – the main differences between Abū al-Fath's account and the Biblical *Esther* story originate not with Abū al-Fath but with other, Jewish, retellings of the *Esther* story that were in circulation by the time Abū al-Fath was writing in the fourteenth century.

Conclusions

Scholars have long known that the Samaritan community has neither the Purim festival nor the *Book of Esther* that sanctions it. Indeed, the community's claims to pre-exilic antiquity would be undermined were it to accept such products of the Persian era.⁴⁰ The point of this article is not to overturn the scholarly consensus by arguing that the Samaritans do indeed include *Esther* in their canon, but to demonstrate that the story recounted in *Esther* was known to them and reworked by Abū al-Fath (and later, referred to by the author of *Chronicle Adler*) in order to "Samaritanize" it. It is not that Samaritan authors deemed this book of the Bible to be incorrect or offensive, for which reason it needed to be "corrected." After all, much of the Jewish Bible is incorrect or

³⁹ *Sefer Yosippon*, 1:49 ll.11–19 (the plot of the eunuchs), 1:49 ll.17–19 (Haman seeks revenge against the Jews for Mordecai's uncovering the plot of the eunuchs), 1:48 l.2 (Haman "stole king Ahasuerus's heart").

⁴⁰ Thus, the "Purim" that Mills claims to have witnessed – if Purim it was – had to be re-imagined as a celebration of deliverance from a threat in ancient Egypt.

offensive to Samaritans but they have not methodically rewritten the Prophets or Writings from a Samaritan perspective. Rather, it would appear that the *Esther* story was deemed by Abū al-Fath̄ to be part of history (as opposed to Scripture). Indeed, scholars from Josephus onwards have covered the story of the Jews during Ahasuerus' reign within their historical chronicles and summaries of the *Esther* story are to be found in "historical" works written by such luminaries as al-Tabarī, al-Bīrūnī, the author of *Sefer Yosippon*, Bar Hebraeus, and others. And as the *Esther* story is an episode of history that took place during the reign of king Ahasuerus, at the height of the Jewish-Samaritan rivalry referred to in *Ezra 4*, in rewriting the *Esther* story Abū al-Fath̄ might simply have been motivated by the desire to set the historical record straight.

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New Evidence for the Survival of Sexually Libertine Rites among some Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs of the Nineteenth Century

Bella Tendler Krieger

Charges of sexual deviance, including sodomy, wife sharing, incest, and the orgiastic night have dogged the Nuṣayrīs from their earliest history. As similar allegations can be found in the heresiographical treatises of many cultures,¹ most scholars of Islamic heterodoxy have dismissed these types of accusations as mere polemical slander.² While this may be the case in some instances, it is important not to discount these reports simply because of their polemical packaging. The heresiographical accounts can often preserve actual sectarian customs that were merely misunderstood or misrepresented by the orthodox establishment. For example, as I demonstrated in a previous article, the charge of homosexuality that al-Nawbakhtī leveled against the Nuṣayrīs was likely based on a misconstrual of their initiation ceremonies, which were conducted as symbolic marriages between men.³ Since the Nuṣayrīs vehemently opposed homosexuality it is unlikely that the heresiographical accounts also preserve memory of an actual sodomizing rite.⁴ Nevertheless one cannot assume that a charge is libelous simply because it is shocking. Sexual behavior in the pre-modern Islamic world was far more diverse than one might imagine today and

¹ See for example Benko, *Pagan Rome*, 54–78; Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies*, 76–81, 103–4; Russel, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, 90–4.

² Hodgson, “How Did the Early Shi‘a become Sectarian?,” 7; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, xxii, 136–8, 410; Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 67; Buckley, “The Early Shiite Ghulāh,” 314; Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, 140; Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians*, 114.

³ Tendler Krieger, “Marriage, Birth, and *Bāṭinī Ta’wīl*.” This article explores the ways in which the early Nuṣayrīs conceived initiation upon the analogy between sexual intercourse and the transmission of religious knowledge. Extending from this analogy, they structured their first stage of initiation as a marriage between a shaykh, who stands in the position of the husband, and a novice, who is his wife. Since both partners in this union are actually male, it makes sense that charges of sodomy should have been cast against the Nuṣayrīs, but in practice the union was strictly educational and did not involve any physical intimacy.

⁴ For Nuṣayrī condemnations of *ubna* (passive homosexuality), see al-Ju‘fī, *K. al-Haft*, 140–1; al-Ṭabarānī, “al-Risāla al-jawhariyya,” 25; al-Ṭabarānī, “K. al-Ḥāwī,” 67, 75.

it is important not to impose current morality (or even the morality of the medieval Islamic theologians) on the Muslim sects.

In her recently published book *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, Crone demonstrates how several of the charges leveled against the heterodox sects contain kernels of truth that were distorted and sensationalized by the Islamic theologians. For example, she shows how the accusations of sexual communism ubiquitously associated with the Khurramites reflect a rural Iranian custom whereby brothers held wives and property in common.⁵ Like European primogeniture, this practice ensured that land would not be subdivided among numerous heirs. This type of fraternal polyandry was by no means the libertine free for all described by the heresiographers, but simply a practice that testifies to an alternate sexual morality that time and Islamic conformity have eliminated.

However, it is not fair to whitewash all of the charges. It is certainly possible that some of the sexual rites described in the heresiographies were actually practiced, and precisely for their transgressive value. As antinomians the Nuṣayrīs considered themselves above the ritual obligations of Islam.⁶ That this belief translated into complete libertinism is unlikely. It is hard to imagine a sect surviving for over a millennium without sexual regulations, and enough evidence exists that would contradict this assumption. Nevertheless the ideological groundwork for a certain libertinism is present and may even have been instantiated by antinomian factions in the sect, as will be shown in what follows.

A newly discovered manual, ms Taymūr ‘Aqā’id 564, currently housed in the *Khizāna al-Taymūriyya* of the *Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya*, appears to have belonged to such a group.⁷ Written in Hama in 1306/1889, it is a manual for

5 Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 391–438.

6 See Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī Religion*, 111–52; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, “Dogma and Ritual,” 57–65; Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 130–42, 149–52; Tendler, “Concealment and Revelation,” 157–69.

7 The *Khizāna al-Taymūriyya* is the private collection of manuscripts donated to the *Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya* in 1930 by Ahmad Taymūr, a wealthy Egyptian of Kurdish extraction. In the *Fihris al-khizāna al-taymūriyya* this manuscript is descriptively titled *al-Majmū‘fi ‘aqā’id al-nuṣayrīyya* (a collection about Nuṣayrī doctrines) and the only detail provided is that it was transcribed in 1306 AH and includes the doctrines and prayers of the Nuṣayrīs. (*Fihris al-khizāna al-taymūriyya* 3:117.) It is also listed as item 124 in Massignon’s bibliography of Nuṣayrī works; see Massignon, “Esquisse d’une bibliographie Nusayrie,” 648. Neither cataloger appears to have inspected the manuscript with any care, as they seem to be unaware of its unique content, which extends beyond these chapters on sexual libertinism. The actual title which appears on the cover page of the manuscript is *K. al-Majmū‘*, which can literally be translated as “the canon or the compilation” under which is a subtitle explaining that the

Nuṣayrī novices that contains explicit instruction for the rites of guest prostitution and the orgiastic night. It also includes chapters encouraging communalism of wives and promoting incest as a sacred practice.

Since this is the only Nuṣayrī text, and actually the first text of any Islamic sect, explicitly to confirm the heresiographical reports, a certain suspicion is in order. Could this manuscript be a travesty written by an enemy of the sect? There are reasons to assume that it is authentic. Only a small percentage of the work is dedicated to these rites. The rest of the manual includes practices and prayers that can be confirmed from other sources. Moreover, the libertine sections do not read like a forgery; the author provides dissenting legal opinions regarding who must observe the rites, includes cautionary tales to discourage non-compliance, and even offers mundane suggestions that would hardly feature in a polemical treatise. The manual reads as though it were written to educate a Nuṣayrī audience, and not as a counterfeit exposé for the masses.⁸

book contains, “the mystery of God, the obligations, the prayers, the invocations, the ritual laws, and the distinguishing signs of our sacred community.” The author/copyist of this text is not named but from the dedication inscription that appears at the end of the manuscript we know that it was written as an instruction manual for the believers of Hama who did not have a local shaykh to instruct them on the beliefs and practices of the religion. The author writes, “I have transcribed this blessed manuscript, issued according to its correct source on 8 Jumādā al-Awwal 1306 (January 9, 1889) for the benefit of our brothers in the faith in the city of Hama where there is no guide and no imam. I have donated it to them and I do not want anything in return other than prayer and acceptance.” The author then identifies himself ambiguously as “the mendicant who supplicates on behalf of the right of the brothers to Ibn Nuṣayr the believer” (ms Taymūr, *Aqā’id* 564, 80).

- 8 One issue that must be resolved before accepting the authenticity of this text is the striking similarity it displays with the *K. al-Bākūra al-sulaymāniyya fī kashf asrār al-diyāna al-nuṣayriyya* of the well-known Nuṣayrī convert to Protestantism, Sulaymān al-Adhanī. Roughly 50 percent of the material found in the *K. al-Bākūra* can also be found in this text. Published in Beirut in 1863, al-Adhanī’s exposé of the Nuṣayrī religion caused quite a stir, both within Syria and within the Orientalist circles abroad. By 1864 it was already translated into English in Salisbury’s “The Book of Sulayman’s First Ripe Fruit,” and it served as the basis for Dussaud’s *Histoire et religion des Noṣairīs* in 1900. Considering the notoriety of the text, it is unlikely that the author of the Taymūriyya manuscript would have been unaware of al-Adhanī’s publication. However, I do not believe that he based his own work on it. My current analysis is that both authors relied on a third independent source, a *K. al-Majmū‘*, which was commonly given to initiates, and could therefore serve as the basis for both texts. (See Tendler, “Concealment and Revelation,” 123–7.) Another suggestion that one might raise is whether al-Adhanī personally wrote the Taymūriyya ms. This is unlikely to be the case. It is conventionally assumed that the Nuṣayrīs murdered al-Adhanī for having revealed their secrets, although there are conflicting reports as to how he met his demise. (Live burial, burning, and strangulation are the most common suggestions: see Jessup, *Women of the Arabs*, vii; al-Tawil, *Tārikh al-‘alawiyīn*, 448; and Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 260, 503.) Jessup provides the

On the other hand, the libertine portions of the text are marked by various stylistic and doctrinal irregularities that raise suspicion of forgery.⁹ To begin with, the author/copyist does not provide his name and he rarely names his sources, simply attributing many of his ideas to “our shaykhs.” He frequently refers to his sect as the Nuṣayriyya, an appellation that is uncommon in religious treatises, where the terms *muwahhidūn* (monotheists) or *ahl al-tawḥīd* (people of the doctrine of unity) are more commonly used.¹⁰ From a doctrinal perspective, he accords women a much higher religious role than they receive in other Nuṣayrī works.¹¹ He uses expressions, such as *‘uqqāl* (the wise ones) and *juhhāl* (the ignorant ones), that are not typical of the Nuṣayrīs, but were already well-known feature of Druze society.¹² In one instance, he calls the Imām al-Ḥusayn by the epithet *al-shahīd* (the martyr), despite the fact that Nuṣayrīs vehemently deny his death and even commemorate ‘Āshūrā’ as a day of celebration.¹³ Are these irregularities simply idiosyncrasies of the author or

only death date I have been able to find as 1871, quite a long time after his *K. al-Bākūra* came out, but still some 18 years before our MS was written. It should be noted that al-Adhanī did not die a Protestant, as generally supposed. Several letters written between the years 1862 and 1865 and published in *The Missionary Herald*, the annual newsletter of the Associate Reform Church, mention al-Adhani by name and provide important new details about his life, conversion, and works. Significantly, they mention that a year after the publication of his book, in 1864, he defected from the Protestant Church and converted to Greek Orthodoxy in order to marry the daughter of a Greek priest in Latakia. They also mention that in 1865 he wrote a second book, which I have not yet been able to locate, denouncing Protestantism and promoting Greek Orthodoxy. (See Salibi and Khoury, *The Missionary Herald*, 5:59–61, 87, 97, 117. Also see Traboulsi’s forthcoming article “The American Missionaries and the Nuṣayrīs,” which promises to deal with al-Adhani’s life.)

⁹ I would like to thank Mosa Hariri of the Silsilat al-Turāth al-‘Alawī for calling my attention to some of these problems.

¹⁰ A recent discussion of the sect’s name can be found in Procházka-Eisl and Procházka, *Plain of Saints*, 19–23.

¹¹ Women are said to have been created of the sins of devils, and therefore to lack any religious capacity. See al-Ju’fi, *K. al-Haft*, 49, 143–4; al-Ṭabarānī, “K. al-Dalā’il,” 141, 45; al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 61. The exclusion of women from the religious sphere has practical implications for Nuṣayrī laws of initiation, where all Quranic statements that concern women are reinterpreted to refer to male novices. See Tendler Krieger, “Marriage, Birth, and *Bāṭinī Ta’wīl*.”

¹² Among the Nuṣayrīs, the terms *khaṣṣa* (elite) and *‘āmma* (masses) are more commonly used. See Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 144–7.

¹³ According to the Nuṣayrī understanding of the Battle of Karbalā’, Ḥanẓala al-Shibāmī, a follower of al-Ḥusayn, received his form and was killed in his stead. Some add that Ḥanẓala was then replaced by the Caliph ‘Umar, so it was actually the principle enemy

do they reflect the ignorance of an outsider? A more complete analysis of this manuscript and its provenance is necessary to resolve this question.

However, even if the text is shown to be authentic, it is difficult to determine whether the libertine rituals described within are ancient Nuşayrī customs or merely modern appropriations of heresiographical motifs. It is possible that after so many centuries of being accused of these practices some Nuşayrīs embraced them as a matter of pride. The awareness that the author of this manuscript betrays of heresiographical terminology suggests that he was, at the very least, familiar with the heresiographical discourse. In preparation for a more in-depth study of this manuscript, which I am currently editing for publication, I have collected some of what we know about these rites from other sources. I have also included a transcription and translation of the relevant portions of the text.

The Rite of Guest Prostitution

In MS Taymūr *Aqā'īd* 564 the rite of guest prostitution, i.e., offering one's wife to visiting shaykhs, is called *al-fard al-lāzim wa-'l-haqq al-wājib*, meaning "the imperative and obligatory duty." The Taymūriyya manuscript is not the first nineteenth-century text to speak of this practice among the Nuşayrīs. The Nuşayrī apostate Sulaymān al-Adhanī wrote about it, using this same designation, some 30 years earlier in his *K. al-Bākūra*. Al-Adhanī claims to have experienced this custom first-hand while visiting the home of a Kalāzī shaykh in the village of Wadī Jarb on his way to Antakya in Turkey. He writes:¹⁴

I encountered a shaykh from the elite and he invited me to stay with him. When night fell they made a bed for me in an empty room. It was close to two o'clock when suddenly there was someone knocking on the door so I opened it and lo a woman entered, locked the door, and lay down beside me. She startled me, as I did not know her intention. After a bit she began to speak to me and said, "Do you not accept 'the imperative and obligatory duty' (*al-fard al-lāzim wa-'l-haqq al-wājib*)?" Suddenly the words of

of the believers who was killed on that day. See al-Ṭabarānī, *Majmū‘ al-a'yād*, 107–32; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 387–92; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuşayrī-Ālawī Religion*, 128–35; Friedman, *Nuşayrī-Ālawīs*: 158–9. This docetic conception of al-Husayn's death was not unique to the Nuşayrīs, see Crow, "The Death of al-Husayn," 71–116.

¹⁴ Al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 93–4; trans. in Salisbury, "The Book of Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit," 285.

the imam and guide [who had previously mentioned a rite by this name] came to my mind and I realized that the “imperative and obligatory duty” is offering their women to each other.

Al-Adhanī continues to explain that this experience is exactly what made him break with the Nuṣayrī religion altogether, as he realized that he would be obliged to share his own wife in this same manner.

In light of his polemical agenda throughout the *K. al-Bākūra*, modern scholarship has generally dismissed al-Adhanī’s account as so much slander.¹⁵ However, since he took the pains to describe the Kalāzian rationale for this practice, his report deserves serious consideration. He explains:¹⁶

According to the Kalāzī sect it is “an imperative and obligatory duty” that if an imam of theirs visits another imam who is his equal, the second is required to present his wife to the first. They call this practice, as mentioned above, an imperative and obligatory duty (*fard lāzim wa-ḥaqq wājib*) and they rule that the one who opposes it does not enter heaven. The masses (*‘āmma*) [of the sect] do not know about this. They adduce from the Quran, *Sūrat al-Ahzāb*, proof for this corruption, from where it says (Q 33.50), “any believing woman who offers herself freely to the Prophet and whom the Prophet might be willing to wed: This is a privilege for you, and not for other believers.” They interpret this verse by saying that prophets do not marry (*ma’sūm ‘an al-zawāj*) and therefore this verse is directed to us. Thus the prophet that is mentioned [in the verse] is the imam, i.e., the elite guide (*al-murshid al-khāṣṣ*) and the “believing woman” is the wife of any elite imam. Mention of this obligation appears in the *K. al-Dalā’il bi-ma’rifat al-masā’il* of Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī which [in turn] references the *K. al-Haft* whose authorship they attribute to Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, from the “ten rules” that are found in it. The tenth rule is “the imperative and obligatory duty” on every believer to gratify his fellow believer as he gratifies himself. They understand from this presenting their wives to their elite. Mention of this also appears in *K. al-Ta’yīd*. As for the Northerners [al-Adhanī’s clan], they interpret this as granting knowledge and money [to the traveling imam].

¹⁵ Bar-Asher and Kofsky note that al-Adhanī’s account echoes a Nuṣayrī polemic against the Druze preserved and refuted in the eleventh century Druze *Rasā’il al-hikma*. See Bar-Asher and Kofsky, “A Druze–Nuṣayrī Debate,” 154–9.

¹⁶ Al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 59.

Of the three references that al-Adhanī cites for this practice, the only one I have been able to verify, and only partially, is al-Tabarānī's eleventh century *K. al-Dalā'il*, in which there is in fact mention of a *haqq Allāh al-wājib* with regard to satisfying the needs of traveling believers. However, there is no indication that this might extend to sharing wives. Al-Tabarānī writes, "Whoever fulfills God's obligatory duty (*haqq Allāh al-wājib*), what remains for him to do? It remains for him to greet his brothers to satisfy their needs."¹⁷

It is possible, as al-Adhanī claims, that some Nuṣayrīs understood this obligation to extend to sharing their wives with traveling shaykhs. However, this is probably not an interpretation that al-Tabarānī would have endorsed, for in the *K. al-Hāwī* he seems to imply that such a practice is deeply immoral. Regarding the duties of initiates to their brethren he writes that believers can enter each other's homes, even uninvited, and freely dispose of their "circumstances" (*aḥwāl*).¹⁸ This phrasing sounds much like communism although he clarifies that it refers to employing wives of other believers to wash clothes and prepare food. He explains that by carrying out these domestic responsibilities a woman can ascend in her reincarnations and return as a man in her next life, so that she can finally merit salvation. As if to specifically refute the idea of sexual communism, al-Tabarānī immediately states that anyone who fornicates with the wife of a believer will be forced to return through *maskh* (degrading reincarnations). It seems from this that the practice of guest prostitution did exist in the early years of the sect but that al-Tabarānī opposed it.

Al-Tabarānī may however have taken a more liberal attitude towards sharing slavegirls. In his *K. al-Ma'ārif*, recently published by Bar-Asher and Kofsky, he reports a ḥadīth in which Muḥammad b. Sinān asks Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.¹⁹

If a man owns a slavegirl with whom he has sexual intercourse, how should he behave? ... He should give half of her to his brother ... [The one without the slavegirl] should ask his brother's permission to take her (*yasta'athan akhāhu bi-maskiha*) or to buy her and to pay half her price. If he gives him what he requires or its worth then this fulfills "the duties of the brothers" (*huqūq al-ikhwān*). Because a believer is a full brother of another believer; he shares everything with him, whether it be money, furniture,²⁰ clothes, riding animals, food, or drink. Even to the extent that

¹⁷ Al-Tabarānī, "K. al-Dalā'il," 118.

¹⁸ Al-Tabarānī, "K. al-Hāwī," 98–9.

¹⁹ Al-Tabarānī, *K. al-Ma'ārif*, 153–4.

²⁰ The word used is *matā'*, which can also mean sexual enjoyment, but it seems from the list that the reference here is to household goods.

if he has only one slavegirl and his brother does not have one he should buy one for him if he is able. But if he is unable, [the one without] should not anger his brother [by taking her uninvited], for he is not allowed to take her without his permission.²¹

The wording of this ḥadīth is somewhat ambiguous. Should the believer lend his slavegirl to his brother, or grant him ownership of her gratis (or at half cost)? Certainly, if he has the means to do so, he should buy him his own slavegirl. But if he is unable, may he share her with his brother? The context suggests that he may. Immediately preceding this question, al-Ṣādiq instructs that if a man has only one riding animal he should take turns with his brother, “riding it one day and his brother, the next.”²² The implication here is that a slavegirl, like a horse, is property, and should be shared. This is not sexual communism, as the owner retains ultimate posession of his slavegirl and his permission is still required for her use. It is rather an extreme form of charity that reinforces the brotherhood of all believers.

Of course, sharing one's slavegirl is not quite the same as sharing a wife, but the underlying logic is easily extended. For his part, al-Ṭabarānī rejects this interpretation of the *haqq al-ikhwān*. In fact, in this same ḥadīth, he reports al-Ṣādiq's instruction, “If you have a wife and your brother does not, you should marry him off with your money and your reputation, for this is equality.”²³ In other words, you should use your personal influence to help him find a wife and then provide assistance for the dower, the marriage banquet, and other related expenses, but you should not lend him your own wife. This is a departure from the rest of the ḥadīth, which instructs believers to share their property, and evidences al-Tabarānī's opposition to the practice of wife sharing.

Although many centuries divide al-Ṭabarānī's writing in the eleventh century from the two texts that describe the *fard al-lāzim wa-’l-haqq al-wājib* in the nineteenth, it seems reasonable to assume that certain factions of the sect did engage in some form of guest prostitution as a religious rite.²⁴ This rite,

²¹ Note that the husband's permission is also a requirement of the *fard al-lāzim wa-’l-haqq al-wājib* as described in MS Taymūr, *Aqā’id* 564, 19.

²² Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ma’ārif*, 153.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ There is also a nineteenth-century report of an American traveler who writes, “[the Nosairieh] are not immoral, so the Missionaries assert, except that they sell their daughters to the Turks as slaves; and that their religious heads or sheikhs are privileged to cohabit with any woman, married or unmarried, and the husbands even urge the sheikhs to honor them by the selection of their wives” (Peters, *Nippur*, 2:212). This statement is later than al-Adhani’s, so it is difficult to know if it is an entirely distinct account. For more

considered a fulfillment of the *haqq Allāh* or *haqq al-ikhwān*, was meant to instill a sense of brotherhood among practitioners, and to provide for the needs of fellow initiates traveling far from home.

Incest and the Orgiastic Night

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the idea that Nuṣayrīs engaged in an orgiastic night was even more prevalent than rumors of guest prostitution. It was discussed, with varying levels of credulity, by Niebuhr, Volney, Burckhardt, Condor, Taylor, von Hammer, Silvestre de Sacy, De Nerval, Walpole, Lyde, and Dussaud.²⁵ The idea was so widely attested that it inspired the free-love doctrines of the nineteenth century Black American Rosicrucian, Paschal Beverly Randolph, who claimed to model his ‘sex magic’ rituals on the Nuṣayrīs.²⁶ However, unlike the charge of guest prostitution, the orgiastic night is not discussed or even alluded to in any available Nuṣayrī text other than MS Taymūr ‘Aqā’id 564. Nor is it mentioned by al-Adhanī, who would certainly have included such damning information in his *K. al-Bākūra*, had it been available to him.

The Orientalists who described this rite mentioned two details that are also found in the Taymūriyya manuscript. These are that the practitioners would extinguish the lights at the commencement of the ceremony and that they would engage in intercourse without regard to kin or consanguinity.²⁷

on this rite in other Middle Eastern communities, see J. Chelhod, “Du nouveau à propos du ‘matriarcat’ arabe,” 82; van Gelder, *Close Relationships*, 19–21; Crone, *Nativist Prophets*: 427–33.

25 Niebuhr, *Reisen*, 2:357; Volney, *Travels*, 2:5–6; Burckhardt, *Travels*, 152. Although here reported of the Ismā’īlis in the area; Conder, *Syria*, 266–8; Taylor, *History*, 202; von Hammer-Purgstall, *Assassins*, 214–5; Silvestre de Sacy, *Exposé*, 574–5; De Nerval, *Women of Cairo*, 2:130–6. The principle narrative concerns the Druze, but the Nuṣayrīs are also mentioned; Walpole, *The Ansayrii*, 3:334; Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 102–9; Dussaud, *Histoire*, 153–60.

26 Deveney, “The Coming of the Nusa’iri,” 211–40. The idea also inspired a fantastical early twentieth century French novel by Jehan Cendrieux titled, *Al-Ghādir ou le Sexe-Dieu*, which contains no authentic Nuṣayrī material, but demonstrates the pervasiveness of the orgiastic night as a staple of orientalist fantasy.

27 Perhaps the best example is von Hammer-Purgstall, who wrote concerning the Nuṣayrīs, Druze, and Ismā’īlis (*Assassins*, 213–14):

“All these still existing sects are designated by the Moslimin generally, Sindike (*free-thinkers*), Mulhad (*impious*), and Batheni (*esoterics*), and on account of their nocturnal

Obviously these two ideas are related, as it is difficult to discriminate between sexual partners in the dark. While this confirmation should theoretically support the authenticity of the manuscript, it is actually its most suspicious fea-

assemblies, sometimes the one, sometimes the other, receive from the Turks the name of *Mumsoindiren*, or the *extinguishers* [in Ottoman], because, according to the accusations of their religious adversaries, they extinguish the lights, for the purpose of indulging in promiscuous intercourse, without regard to kindred or sex."

The term *mumsoindiren* or *müm söndürün* (candle extinguishers, sometimes called *cheragh-koshan* in Persian) was generally associated with the Qizilbash sects, who were also accused of this practice (see Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 136–8). For a legend about the origins of this ceremony preserved by the seventeenth century Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi see Dankoff, "Unpublished Account," 69–73. According to this legend, Shaykh Şafi al-Din (d.735/1334), the eponym of the Safavid dynasty, ordered the light-extinguishing rite as the climax of a seven-hour Sufi *dhikr* to which both men and women were invited. As a great miracle, despite the "dark of night" and the "whirling crowd of people," every man found his own wife, so that no sin was actually committed. This miracle continued throughout the lifetime of Şafi al-Din, but when his deputies continued this after his death, they did not merit this miracle, and so the Persians participating in this once sacred practice unwittingly indulged in indiscriminate fornication. To correct this travesty a certain Shaykh Şâlih, buried in Urmiya, abolished the light extinguishing ceremony and prohibited men and women from performing *dhikr* together. Evliya insists that despite rumors of the persistence of *müm söndürmek* among the Persian Qizilbash, he has never witnessed any evidence to support these claims. He does however contrast the Qizilbash with other sects (whom he calls *Nukhûdi*) "scattered throughout the Druze and Teymani mountains of Syria, who are seventy times worse than the Qizilbash." I have not been able to identify this term, and wonder if he means Nuşayrî. In his short description of Nuşayrî territory, he mentions that, "when the sun sets," the Nuşayris of Behlûliye, a village in Latakia, "engage in secret worship, [and while] they perform the ritual prayer among outsiders, they marry [have sex with?] their own girls" (Dağlı, et al., eds., *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, 9194b. I would like to thank Michael Cook and İlker Erim Binbas for their help translating this text). This certainly sounds like a light-extinguishing ceremony, although it is patently not a first-hand account. In comparing the rumors of orgiastic ceremonies among the Qizilbash and Nuşayrîs, it should be noted that modern scholarship has generally dismissed the Qizilbash orgiastic night as a polemical caricature of their religious ceremonies, which, as already alluded to in Evliya's account, were conducted with male and female participants; see Imber, "The Persecution of Ottoman Shi'ites," 261; Karolewski, "What is Heterodox About Alevism?" 443. However, this explanation should not work in the case of the Nuşayris, who, as far as we know from all other sources, did not initiate women or allow them to participate in their rituals. The rumors of Nuşayrî celebration of an orgiastic night must therefore be explained in another way, perhaps as a transfer of motifs from one sect to another, perhaps as a slanderous exaggeration of the sect's general antinomianism, or perhaps as an account of an actual rite adopted by certain libertine elements of the sect.

ture. Most heresiographical attestations of the orgiastic night include these same motifs, which lead one to believe that these are merely tropes rather than accurate descriptions of sectarian practice.²⁸ In fact, it is for this very reason that Crone discounts the orgiastic night as a polemical fantasy, despite her acceptance of real practices behind most other sexual rites described in the heresiographies.²⁹

Yet, the inclusion of these details in the Taymūriyya manuscript need not detract from its credibility. The antiquity and prevalence of these ideas may reasonably have inspired the author of the ceremony (or indeed the author of the manuscript) to introduce them in his own version of the rite. Just as a modern dabbler in the occult might have certain ideas, impressed by countless images and literary references, of how to conduct a séance (for example, he might use candles, hold hands, and chant an invitation to the deceased), an organizer of an orgy might adopt those features he knows belong in such a ceremony.

Moreover, while the Taymūriyya manuscript does repeat these tropes, it does not do so in the same clichéd fashion found in the other texts. For example, incestuous copulation in ms Taymūr ‘Aqā’id 564 is portrayed as the objective of the ceremony, and not simply an inevitable outcome of the darkness. Only family members are invited to the orgy, for as the author explains, the goal of the ceremony is to demonstrate the permissibility of close kin marriages, which are only publically avoided for purposes of *taqīya*.

Now, as any student of Islamic heresiology will know, charges of incest are just as common as those of wife sharing and the orgiastic night. Accurate or not, these accusations were meant to portray the heterodox sects as a crypto-Zoroastrians. It was well known to the Islamic theologians that Zoroastrians

²⁸ In the Islamic heresiographical literature it was first attested by al-Baghdādī against the Khurramite Bābakiyya (al-Baghdādī, *K. al-Farq*, 252), but the charge is nearly 1,000 years older, and was leveled by the Pagans against the Early Christians and the Church fathers against the Gnostics before the Muslim theologians turned it on the *ghulāt*. See “The First Apology of Justin,” chapter 26, in Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:172; Clement of Alexandria, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” chapter 3, in *ibid.*, 2:383; Tertullian, “Apology,” chapter 8, in *ibid.*, 3:24; Minucius Felix, “The Octavius,” in *ibid.*, 4:178; Origen, “Against Celsus,” book 6, chapter 27, in *ibid.*, 4:585; Epiphanius, 85–6 (26:4–5). In the Christian context, the extinguishing of the light was often said to have been achieved by tying a lamp to the tail of a dog who, when tempted by scraps of meat, would overturn the lamp, plunging the room into darkness.

²⁹ Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 435–8.

used to practice close-kin marriages, called *khwēdōdah*.³⁰ Although the practice was eventually abolished among mainstream Zoroastrians, it is certainly possible that some neo-Zoroastrian groups revived it in opposition to Islam. Is this feature of the ceremony then a relic of *khwēdōdah*, or merely a deliberate incorporation of yet another heresiological motif? In other words, could this practice have survived among the Nuṣayrīs from the days when close kin marriages were common, or should we understand this element of the ceremony as the author's attempt to neutralize the heresiographical accusations of incest by portraying the practice as an ancient and respectable rite?

The second trope, that of extinguishing the lights, is also portrayed in a neo-Zoroastrian fashion. The author of the manuscript instructs the shaykh conducting the ceremony to recite a prayer celebrating God as light and then to extinguish the lamp without using his breath. Both of these elements are well known Zoroastrian ideas: Ahura Mazda, the Zoroastrian God of Light, is worshipped through fire, and so to this day priests serving in fire-temples wear masks (called *padān*), so as not to pollute the fire with their breath.³¹ It is clear that the Islamic theologians were aware of this aspect of Zoroastrian religion for al-Bīrūnī reports that the Zoroastrian Mahdī who ruled in Qarmaṭī Bahrain in 319/931 forbade people to put out fire with their breath, threatening to cut out the tongue of any man who did so.³² While it is certainly true that many Zoroastrian elements are preserved in the syncretistic religious system of the Nuṣayrīs,³³ the stacking of these three elements of incest, God as light, and the prohibition of breathing on fire, seems to be a particularly deliberate association of Zoroastrian motifs with the orgiastic night. This endeavor is certainly unique and is not echoed in any of the other sources.

What did the nineteenth century orientalists think was the purpose of this rite? Those few who sought to explain it as anything more than hedonistic debauchery tended to appeal to notions of spiritual transcendence, mystical union, and the hieros gamos. Silvestre de Sacy, citing the *R. al-Dāmigha li-l-*

³⁰ van Gelder, *Close Relationships*, 36–78; Amir-Moezzi, “Shahrbānū,” 57–8. For a description of the practice in ancient Iran see West, “The Meaning of the Khvētük-Das,” 18:389–430; Slotkin, “On a Possible Lack of Incest Regulations,” 612–17; Goodenough, “Comments,” 326–8; Spooner, “Iranian Kinship and Marriage,” 51–9; Herrenschmidt, “Note,” 53–67; Herrenschmidt, “Le Xwētōdas,” 113–25; as well as the numerous references found in Skjærvø, “Marriage: Next of Kin,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

³¹ Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, 60.

³² Al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār*, 260. (213 =196 in the Sachau edition). For more details of this event see Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*, 257. I'd like to thank Crone for directing me to this source.

³³ Bar-Asher, “The Iranian Component of the Nuṣayrī Religion,” 217–27; Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-Ālawīs*, 230–3.

fāsiq (Epistle crushing the wicked), a Druze anti-Nuṣayrī polemic attributed to Ḥamza b. ‘Alī (d. after 411/1021), explained that Nuṣayrīs considered spiritual union (*nikāḥ al-bāṭin*) to be incomplete without carnal union (*nikāḥ al-ẓāhir*).³⁴ Volney, Burckhardt, and Walpole related the orgiastic night to veneration of the female genitalia, a notion, which, according to Bar-Asher and Kofsky, is still prevalent in Syria today, where Nuṣayrīs are derogatively dubbed ‘*ubbād al-farj* (worshippers of the female genitalia).³⁵ Considering the deeply rooted misogyny of the sect, this idea seems unlikely. More probable is the statement found in the same *R. al-Dāmigha* that Nuṣayrīs consider the vulva to symbolize disbelief, so that intercourse is actually a militant representation of the subjugation of falsehood.³⁶ However, this idea is equally unconfirmed in the available Nuṣayrī texts, and no spiritual significance seems to be attached to the sexual act in Nuṣayrīsm except as a symbol in the context of initiation.

As for the Taymūriyya manuscript, the function of the ceremony is explicitly transgressive. It is described as a deliberate demonstration of their essential antinomianism. The author stresses the fact that although they must generally conform to their Islamic surroundings, they are actually above the law, and must commemorate this freedom with a ‘night of libertinism’ (*laylat al-ibāḥa*). This celebration is also called a ‘night of great worship’ (*laylat al-‘ibāda al-‘uẓmā*) and a ‘night of correct remembrance’ (*laylat al-tadhkār al-ṣaḥīḥ*), in that it reminds believers that the laws of Islam, and particularly those relating to consanguinity, do not actually apply to them. It should be pointed out that this notion of the *laylat al-ibāḥa* differs fundamentally from the Bakhtinian Carnivalesque. It is not conceived as an inversion of societal norms, but rather as a brief reprieve from that inversion. It is a reminder of the way society should ideally function, were believers granted free reign to practice their faith.

The author also rationalizes the ceremony with a second mundane and probably idiosyncratic concern over demographics. At several points in the manual he reiterates the principle that anything that increases the population of the *milla* (religious community) is permitted. With regard to the orgy he says that any resulting progeny is legitimate, even though it is the product of incest, because any action that adds to the numbers of the sect is allowed.

34 Silvestre de Sacy, *Exposé*, 2:573–4. The entire polemic can be found in de Smet, *Épîtres Sacrées*, 602–13, translation in 303–17. It has recently been studied in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, “A Druze-Nuṣayrī Debate,” 153–61.

35 Bar-Asher and Kofsky, “A Druze-Nuṣayrī Debate,” 157.

36 “For the female genitalia are like the imams of disbelief, and when the penis enters the genitalia of the woman, it represents the esoteric, and it symbolizes the defeat of the people of the exoteric and the imams of disbelief”; de Smet, *Épîtres Sacrées*: 605–6.

This fits well with what we know of the condition of the Nuşayrīs in the late nineteenth century. Facing harsh reprisals from several abortive revolts against the Ottomans, active missionizing attempts by various Western churches, and government enforced programs of conversion to Hanafite orthodoxy, it is no wonder that the author of this text would have worried over his sect's dwindling numbers.³⁷

Leaving aside the author's stated rationale, one might also seek to explain this rite from a sociological perspective. As is well known, the Nuşayrīs are a secret society. They are taught to hide their religion and even their identity from the outside world, and their communities are structured in such a way as to limit socialization with non-initiates. As Haselrigg points out in his study of secret societies, the isolation of a secret community from the outside world is often accompanied by a rejection of its norms.³⁸ In the Nuşayrī case this can be seen most clearly in their insistence that fully initiated believers are freed from the laws of Islam. Such statements should not merely be understood through the aristocratic conceptions of the theologians who preached them, but also through their cohering and alienating functions. If transgressing the religious norms of Islamic society makes the members of the Nuşayrī community feel special, it also binds them together in a sense of shame with regards to the outside world that prevents them from breaking the trust of the group.

If the libertine rites described in the Taymūriyya manuscript were actually practiced, they should be understood through this lens. Like an underground criminal ring that commits a shared illegal act in order to unite all members in the risk of exposure, Nuşayrīs who purposefully disregard the taboos of the general society feed their vulnerability to the outside world, forcing them to trust their coreligionists in a way that other men need not. Having broken an Islamic precept, the Nuşayrī initiate must personally fear the censure that exposure would bring upon him and work that much harder to preserve the secrecy of the sect. Perhaps this is also why the author of the Taymūriyya manuscript encourages participation in such an obviously transgressive rite.

37 A full history of the Nuşayrīs in the nineteenth century has not yet been written. Some studies that deal with these particular struggles include: Winter, "La revolte Alaouite," 61–71; Talhamy, "Isma'il Khayr Bey," 895–908; Talhamy, "Conscription," 97–112; Douwes, "Knowledge and Oppression," 149–69; Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition," 3–29; Winter, "The Nuşayrīs before the Tanzimat," 97–112; Talhamy, "American Protestant Missionary Activity," 215–36; Alkan, "Fighting for the Nuşayrī Soul," 23–50.

38 Hazelrigg, "A Reexamination," 326.

Other Related Concerns

Also transcribed and translated below is a long chapter entitled *sūrat al-nisā'* (the chapter on women), which is structured as something of a commentary on the Quranic chapter of this name. It is included here because of its many references to communism and repeated instructions for women to make themselves available to their male coreligionists, regardless of consanguinity. To my knowledge it is the only currently available Nuşayrī text directed to women, and presents a far more favorable view of the female sex than found in other sources.

Translation of ms Taymūr *Aqā'id* 564

A Note about the Transcription and Translation

ms Taymūr *Aqā'id* 564 is written in Middle Arabic and I have left the colloquialisms and grammatical mistakes as I found them. Additionally, in quoting Quran and Ḥadīth the author often misquotes or vocalizes incorrectly. I have also left these errors intact, as I believe they are important for understanding the author's level of education and familiarity with Islamic discourse.

Excerpts on Guest Prostitution

[17] They made laws and ordinances for us as a test for our sect and [a way in which we can show] our love for one another. They warned us that we should deem “the gains of this worldly life” (Q 4.94) as though they are nothing and that a Nuşayrī should not be miserly with these towards his brother. If your Nuşayrī brother comes to you, give him to eat and drink and treat him with respect. [18] Do not give preference to yourself over him in anything. If he is one of the shaykhs, chiefs (*naqib*), or nobles (*najib*), then rush to perform the “imperative and obligatory duty” (*al-fard al-lāzim wa-l-haqq al-wājib*). Take care not to withhold it from him for if you do, you will have fallen short in the religion and it will be as though you are of the unbelievers who are outside of our holy sect. So present your wife to him, or your sister, or your mother, or your daughter, so that he can enjoy her for as long as he is with you. For among the Nuşayriyya “the gains of this worldly life” are shared.

Some of our past shaykhs said that the “imperative and obligatory duty” is only religiously required of the lowly [to offer] to the high. However the consensus among us is that it is compulsory for every Nuşayrī to his Nuşayrī brother, whether he is higher or lower than him, other than for the group of the wise ones (*uqqāl*); for this does not apply to them, except with other wise ones

like them. If one of the wise hosts one of the ignorant (*juhhāl*), it would not be permissible for him to present the “imperative and obligatory duty.” However, in the opposite situation [it would be required]. Likewise, if one of the wise is visited by another of his own rank, it is enjoined upon him.

[19] Question: What is the meaning of God’s saying, (Q 17:32), “Do not commit adultery for, behold, it is an abomination and a great sin?”

Answer: Our master said in his appearance as the *ism*³⁹ in Mūsā (Exod. 20:17), “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.” This desire is envy, malice, and turbidity. A Nuşayrī cannot [sleep with his neighbor’s wife] without the knowledge of his fellow Nuşayrī. But if it is as an acceptance of the “imperative and obligatory duty,” then it is not adultery. And if a woman gives herself to you willingly, [then she is] acting with purity for the sake of God.

Question: Is intercourse between a Nuşayrī male and a non-Nuşayrī female considered fornication?

Answer: God Forbid! [Any woman] other than a Nuşayrī woman is merely a reincarnated animal. This is, therefore, not counted as unlawful fornication; rather he is rewarded for it, for if he impregnates her and she bears his child he will have increased the number of Nuşayrīs, for her child will no doubt become Nuşayrī when he grows up. As for a female Nuşayrī, if she fornicates with a non-Nuşayrī, that is [what is considered] unlawful fornication.

[Margin:] However, some of our pious shaykhs object to this and narrate ḥadīths with correct chains of transmission on the authority of Ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī⁴⁰ that if a female Nuşayrī fornicates with a non-Nuşayrī, but she did so out of desire for a child and not out of sexual desire, then she is not a fornicator. Likewise if she sees some benefit in handing herself over to a non-

39 The *ism* is the second aspect of the Nuşayrī trinity, which is comprised of the *ma’nā* (essence), the *ism* (name) – sometimes also called the *hijāb* (veil) – and the *bāb* (door). These three aspects of the godhead repeatedly manifest in human form in order to allow humanity the opportunity to attain gnosis of the divine. In the first Islamic cycle, these roles were occupied by ‘Alī, Muḥammad, and Salmān al-Fārisī, respectively, but in the earlier, Mosaic cycle referred to in the text, Yūsh‘ā was the *ma’nā*, Mūsā was the *ism*, and a man named Dan b. Aṣbā’ūt was the *bāb*; see Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuşayrī-‘Alawī Religion*, 179, for a discussion of these names. In many respects, the Nuşayrī *ism* is similar to the Ismā‘īlī *nātiq* (speaking prophet): he is the lawgiver who brings a revealed text and a new religion to humanity. Thus, Mūsā, ‘Isā, and Muḥammad are all considered to have been manifestations of the *ism* in their respective cycles.

40 Al-Khaṣībī was the tenth-century founder of the sect. Several dates are given for his death, including 346/958, and 358/969. On his life, see Friedman, “al-Khaṣībī,” 91–112; Friedman, *Nuşayrī-‘Alawīs*, 17–33.

Nuṣayrī that will accrue to the sons of the sect, then she is not a fornicator, rather she is rewarded for this in the cycles of her reincarnations. [...]

[20] Our shaykh and master Ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī said, according to what the one who heard from him narrated, that if one of the wise ('uqqāl) comes to you, say, "Peace be upon you, our master, guide, shaykh, protector, and supporter." Then present him everything you can of the obligations of hospitality and do not hold back anything that is in your power to give. For this is required of you. So present him the "imperative and obligatory duty." It is upon you to [present it with] a good nature and an easy temperament and it is upon the wise one to accept it with an open heart and to invoke blessing upon the people of the house, may goodness be upon them, God willing.

One of the ignorant Nuṣayrīs had a very beautiful wife whom he loved very much. When one of the wise visited him, he honored him as he should and did not leave out any means for enjoyment, rather he did them all for him. Except [with respect to] his wife, he acted with the behavior of the unbelievers and prevented her from performing the "imperative and obligatory duty." Our master exacted vengeance on him and turned him and his wife into two pigs, male and female. One of the unbelieving Christians bought them and they were punished in this degrading reincarnation for many years. Finally they became two stones in the door lintel of one of the Muslims.

Excerpts on the Orgiastic Night

[49] A Noble Deed (*Makrūma*)

Nobody is allowed to participate in it except a Nuṣayrī by the secret of his belief in the mystery of 'ayn-*mīm-sīn*⁴¹ and by his worship of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. It is a secret and glad tiding that we transmit to our religious brethren from the rest of the believers in the powerful 'Alī.

Know, my brethren, may the truth confirm you in the truth by adhering to the truth, that the laws are burdens and tests that were imposed as heavy encumbrances on the necks of the people of human form for their failing during the creation of humanity, for the strong influence of the satanic desires [over them], for their ignorance of the divine essence, and for their denial of the divine image that appears in the 'Alawite form.

But we, the society of believers among the Nuṣayrī sect, for our affirmation of 'Alī b. [50] Abī Ṭālib, the God, and the chain of twelve Imams that were sent for guidance, namely, al-Murtadā, al-Mujtabā, al-Shahīd, al-Sajjād, al-Bāqir, al-Šādiq, al-Kāzim, al-Ridā, al-Taqī, al-Naqī, al-Zakī, and al-Hujja /

41 This is an acronym for 'Alī, Muḥammad, and Salmān al-Fārisī, the three historic figures of the Nuṣayrī trinity during the Muḥammadan cycle.

al-Qā'im / al-Muntaṣar, we were freed of the fetters of the burdens. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib relieved us and commanded his apostle to inform us of this so he [Muhammad] addressed us with His words, (Q 5.5) “Today all of the pleasant things are made lawful for you.”⁴² And His words, (Q 7.32) “Say, who is there to forbid the beauty of God.” And His words, (Q 15.42) “you have no power over them.” For every pleasant thing is permissible to us, and everything beautiful is allowed to us, and the Laws have no power over us. We pray, not because it is commanded of us, but because it brings us near [to God]. Our hearts seek it to bring us close to our goal and the object of our desire. We marry, not by contract, and whoever believes that what occurs from the form of the marriage contract at a wedding is a required obligation is guilty of unbelief. Rather it is in compliance with the Satans who currently rule the land. For sexual intercourse for a Nuṣayrī is an effort to sow the seeds of offspring in good land to increase the sons [51] of the sect. Any Nuṣayrī who admires land and wants to throw seed in it seeking a good crop, it is not right to prevent his beneficial intention. Therefore it is not prohibited for us, as it is for others, to marry mothers, sisters, daughters, and the like. However we abstain in accordance with what the people of the sons of our generation agree upon. For this reason, and so that it should not take root in the minds over the long course of history that this abstention is an obligation that the Nuṣayrī was burdened with, our sages and shaykhs established a night of general libertinism (*laylat al-ibāḥa al-‘āmma*). It is an exalted mystery, may God be pleased with those who implement it and reward those of our shaykhs who instructed us for good. They did not leave us a door for doubt or forgetfulness. They said to us, according to what the trustworthy have narrated, you, the fellowship of Nuṣayrīs, have become a small party in the midst of depraved unbelievers. You were required to keep up with their unbelief and falsehood. Since they prohibit the pleasant things for themselves, they obligate you with this [as well], wrongly and out of enmity. Among these is the prohibition of marrying mothers, sisters, daughters, maternal aunts, and paternal aunts. This [prohibition] is one of the things that do not agree with the comfort [promised] to you in the religious and worldly realms, but you cannot openly oppose them. However, as a mercy to you, [52] and in preservation of your religion and the welfare of your faith, we establish for you that which will be merciful for you and prevent you from the denseness of the darkness of disbelief. Verily it is the night of libertinism (*laylat al-ibāḥa*), the night of great worship (*laylat al-‘ibāda al-‘uzmā*), the night of correct remembrance (*laylat al-tadhkār al-sahīḥ*). Let every group of men and women gather, from one home or from several, of [immediate] family and relatives. Let them

⁴² The Arabic is misquoted and incorrectly vocalized here.

call one of the wise ('*uqqāl*), purify, perfume, and adorn themselves, both outwardly and inwardly. Let them gather in one room and put a lamp in the center lit with olive oil, which represents the light that is in all of you on that night. Then the wise one who is with you recites the Chapter of Light for you.⁴³ Listen carefully and pay close attention to what he tells you and at the conclusion of his recitation, let him approach the lamp with humility and submissiveness and call out "wretchedness upon whoever disbelieves in you, O 'Ali." Then he extinguishes it, not by blowing upon it from his mouth. Then he shall say to you, "today the good things are made lawful to you." Whoever sows a seed on that night, in any land he desires, his seed is proper, the outcome is proper, and proper descendants will come from him. You shall stay that entire night together in peace until daybreak.

[53] Indeed it is a night of pleasant things and a night of things that draw one close (to God). O the success of the man whose seed takes root on that night! O the happiness of the woman who pleases the cultivator of her land on that night! "Your women are your tillage" (Q 2.223). Every Nuṣayrī woman is your tillage. A Nuṣayrī may approach his tillage at any time he pleases and anywhere he wants. Any woman who refuses a man who wants to sow his seeds in tillage in order to benefit it and produce a proper offspring, has disbelieved in the deity, rejected the proper teaching, and denied the mystery of '*ayn-mīm-sīn*. They resemble the unbelieving women.

The Chapter on Women

[58] The Chapter on Women

A.Q.M. (*alif qāf mīm*).⁴⁴ These are verses for the auditors. Let there not be distress in your heart and do not be disturbed. Your wives are tillage for all of you, so go unto them with impunity. The pleasant things that you can have sexual intercourse with are not forbidden to you. The women of the believers (lit. those who know) are not forbidden to you, so have sexual intercourse with those that please you. O believers, there is no sin upon you (if you sleep with) your sisters, mothers, paternal aunts, maternal aunts, fraternal nieces, [59] and sororal nieces. If a believing woman withdraws herself from a believer, then she has shame in this world and her Lord will punish her with the most evil of the

43 This is different than the *sūrat al-nūr* of the Quran and is a prayer in which 'Alī is celebrated as light. It can be found in MS Taymūr, '*Aqā'id* 564, 65–7.

44 It is likely that these *muqatṭa'āt* have particular coded meanings, and are not merely imitations of the letter combinations that begin some Quranic sūras. Nuṣayrīs are known to have written ciphers and secret letters in their works; see Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-Ālawīs*, 281–6.

degrading reincarnations. He will afflict her with the greatest misfortunes and will give her to drink of the poisons of hell. He will lodge her in the vilest animal and cycles of years will elapse while she is in enduring punishment. As for those who violate this religious obligation and neglect to adhere to the great duty, I am stingy with him and withhold my mercy from him. I will feed him my punishment and clothe him in the vilest of incarnations. I will take from him the covenant and protection that I bestowed upon him. But if a woman offers herself to her coreligionists and pleasures her brothers and comforts her men, she will have happiness and obtain her desires; her wishes will be granted, and her past and future sins will be forgiven.

O you believing, righteous, and devout women, guard the children in your bellies, nurse them and be good to them while they are children in your arms. Raise them to worship and love me. Teach them my name and agnomen. Accustom them from their youth to preserve the secrets of my *shī'a* and those who worship me, so they may [in turn] plead on your behalf, benefit you, and save you.

[60] Victorious is a woman who believes in the highest *ism*, the highest 'Alī, the *ismī* lion. "There is no using force in religion" (Q 2.256). "No reproof will there be upon any of you from [the] day" (paraphrase of Q 12.92) that "you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers" (paraphrase of Q 53.32), after your birth, on your dying day, and after your resurrection. We have advised you in the loins of your fathers and the bellies of your mothers to be good to your women and to give them your beneficence, and "not to incline completely towards them" (paraphrase of Q 4.129).

Your women are an adornment for you and they are a bed for you, so do not speak rudely to them if they obey you. Do not marry them to someone outside of your religious community (*milla*) and do not hand them over to someone who is living far away from your homes. Plant your seedlings firmly within them. Instruct them to perfume themselves for you, to bathe in your homes, and not to deny your desires. Give them their clothes and their food and what they desire of their adornments. Do not approach women during their pains, for this harms all of you.

O believing, righteous, pure, good woman, do not refuse one who seeks to cultivate and plant fruit among the believers, without exception. Do not say that "this is forbidden and this is allowed." He has declared it lawful for your [61] father, your brother, your son, your paternal uncle, your maternal uncle, the son of your maternal aunt and uncle, the son of your paternal aunt and uncle, your neighbor, and coreligionist to have sexual intercourse with you. Do not refuse any one of them and do not inconvenience a desirer among the believers, the Unitarians, who acknowledge 'Alī the Secure.

Gaze at the moon and its light, how beautiful it is and how sweet! What made it beautiful and sweet? Your Lord ‘Alī in His loftiness lit it from His brilliance. His Christian ‘Isāwī (Jesus-esque) form entrusted it with happiness. And He looks at you from it and dispatches His pleasure to you and supplies you with what you desire and what you hope for.

Gaze at the sun, how beautiful it is! And at its light, how powerful! And at its form, how lovely! And at its rays from their spread, how they keep the earth alive! He makes daytime joyous, hearts happy, and souls cheerful. He lit its radiance with what He deposited in it of its sweetness and the goodness of its clarity. He illuminated it with His ‘Alawite face when the Ḥaydarī (lion) form sat in the center of the high sun and looked at the believing men and believing women, righteous men and righteous women, men who observe His religion, and women who observe. Obey your Lord, your creator, your husband, and the one who seeks from you. Bestow favors upon Him and praise Him.

[62] We have dispatched prophets to you and sent you sages and created wise men among you, so do not say, “We are ignorant of an ordinance of our religion.” Ask them, seek their council, and satisfy them. Carry out their rulings and remunerate their duties. Listen to them and obey them. You will obtain felicity and will not be denied on the Day of Judgment. For you are the first of the delegates and the best of the creations.

O women, I have made men rulers over you, so try to please them and serve them. Raise your sons, teach your daughters, purify your bodies, clean your clothes, maintain your homes, memorize the sayings of your sages (*‘uqqāl*), and respect your family. Avoid deceit, avoid theft, avoid rebellion, lest you be abandoned to the Opponent and *maskh*, *naskh*, and *faskh* (forms of reincarnation). You will be monkeys, return as pigs, be reincarnated as donkeys, and will become scorpions and snakes. I swear by my soul and essence that if you disobey my command secretly or openly, I will take vengeance on you and make you hideous and despicable forms. Beware of disclosing your secrets and the secrets of the sons of your sect, for you are “deficient in intellect and religious capacity.”⁴⁵

[63] Let not a stranger deceive you and [make you] reveal to him that which you conceal and are commanded to preserve. For “this is the evident loss!” (Q 21.11; 39.15.) If a woman divulges her secret to someone outside her religious community, woe to her! She will have suffering in this world and severe punishment [in the next] from which she will find no refuge. Repentance will be of no avail and grief will not appease my great anger that I pour on her as a

45 This is from a well-known ḥadīth. See, for example, al-Bukhārī, *Sahīh*, 1:6.301.

deluge, and my far-reaching treachery with which I harm her as punishment and revenge.

O righteous believing woman, be satisfied with the portion and luck that was allotted to you, and the life of this world that was destined for you. Do not torment your husband with your requests, "for the wealthy according to his means and the impoverished according to his means" (misquotation of Q 2.236). "God does not burden a person except with what he is able to bear" (Q 2.286).

O believer, if you marry a woman hand over her bride price with a good heart and do not covet what you have given her. Provide for her as you provide for yourself. The avaricious, tight-fisted, and those who discomfort their wives, for them is shame in this world and shame and in the next world. Grievous torment will pursue him in the fires of hell. For once its fire is lit, it does not abate, does not subside, does not simmer, and does not boil over.

[64] Indeed we have kept from you that with which we burdened all of humanity. We did not trouble you with law and hardship. So be happy with what we have given you and thankful for what we have graciously bestowed upon you. For you are a tribe of guiltless men and glorified pietists. There is no blame upon you; so worship me, delight in me, and remember me. I have unburdened you of that with which I have burdened others so delight in me over that which I have made you custodians, and placed in your hands as slaves and captives. As I had mercy on you, be merciful. As I have forgiven you, forgive. Women are frail so protect them. They are impoverished so provide for them. They are delicate so embolden them. They are ignorant so teach them. With you is a trust, so protect them and do not mislead them or harm them. [This is] advice from me to you, so do not forget it and do not act in opposition to it. Do not say that Satan made us forget, for this will be perdition for you.

If a woman offers herself to you do not shame her, do not become angry with her, and do not turn her away. Say something kind to her and accept her graciously. Treat her gently for she is frail. Do not shatter her or dash her hopes. This is my injunction that I have enjoined upon your fathers and grandfathers from when I first created you so do not increase [65] my anger with you. For perhaps I shall shorten your time in your human form and be pleased with you and remove the evil of transmigration from your progeny and descendants so that you will return in peace to peace in my generosity, protection, and felicity. I am 'Alī in the beginnings and 'Alī in the ends and no one denies me except for the misguided.

(١٧) وقد جعلوا لنا قوانينا وشرائعاً لنا امتحاناً لطائفتنا وحجاً بعضنا بعض وحدروا علينا إن نعتبر عرض الحياة الدنيا كـليس هي بشيء ولا يجعل النصيري على أخيه بها فإذا ورد عليك أخيك النصيري أطعمه وإسقيه وأكرمه (١٨) ولا توثر نفسك عنه بشيء وإذا كان أحد المشايخ أو النقباء أو النجباء فبادر إلى إداء الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب واياك اياك ان تجعل عليه به فانك ان بخلت بذلك تكون قصرا في الديانة وتكون كأنك من الكفوة الخارجين عن طائفتنا المقدسة فأعرض عليه امراتك او اخلك او امك او ابنتك يتبع بها ما دام مقيم عندك فان عرض الحياة الدنيا هو عند النصيري مشترك بينهم

قال بعض مشايخنا السالفين إن الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب لا يكون لازماً دينياً إلا من الأدنى إلى الاعلا ولكن الذى عليه الإجماع عندنا أنه واجب في عنق كل نصيري لأخيه النصيري سوأكان اعلا أو أدنى منه _ الا جماعة العقال فانهم لا يصح لهم هذا إلا مع امثالهم من العقال فإذا أضاف احد المجهال احد العقال فهذا لا يجوز له ان يعرض على المجهال الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب ولكن بالعكس وكذا اذا زار احد العقال واحد مثله كان ذلك حتم عليه

(١٩) س: ما معنى قوله تعالى ولا تقربوا الزنا انه كان فاحشة واثماً كبيراً

ج: قال سيدنا في مظهره باسم موسى ... لا تشنطه امرة قويك ... فهذا الاشتئاء هو حسد و خبث و عكر لا يجوز للنصيرى ان يفعله بغير علم قريبه النصيرى واما على قبول الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب فليس بزنى ... وان امراة او هبتك نفسها خالصة لوجه الله ...

س: أيدى جماع النصيري بغیر النصیریة زنی

ج: حاشا و كلاً فان ما عدا النصيرية ليست هي إلا عيadan من الحيوانات فلا يعد ذلك منه زنى محرم بل يثاب عليه لانه اذا حبلها وولدت منه يكون قد جاء بنفر نصيري زائداً فان المولود منها لا بد وأن يصير نصيري اذا اكبر . واما النصيرية اذا زنت بغير نصيري فذلك هو الزنى المحرم [written sideways in margin] ولكن بعض مشائخنا التقاة اعتضوا على هذا الذي - ويرون احاديث صحيحة الاستاد عنه استاذنا ابن حمدان الخصيبي ان النصيرية اذا زنت بغير النصيرى وهى تتبعى الولد لا الشهوة فلا تكون زانية كذلك اذا رأت فى تسليم نفسها لغير النصيرى مصلحة تعود على ابناء الطائفة فلا تكون زانية بل ثاب على ذلك فى ادوار قصصنا [...]]

(٢٠) قال شيخنا وسيدنا ابن حمدان الخصبي كما رواه عنه من سمعه منه = اذا دخل عليك احد العقال... فقل السلام عليك يا سيدها ومرشدنا وشيخنا وملاذنا وسندنا وقدم له كل ما يمكّن من واجبات الاكرام ولا تقصير في أى شيء تقتدر عليه فان ذلك فرض عليك وقدم له الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب ... وانت طيب النفس رخي البال وعلى العاقل ان يقبل ذلك منشرح الصدر ويدعو لاهل البيت بخير والخير عليهم إنشاء الله

كان أحد المجهال من النصيرية له امراة جميلة جداً وكان يحبها حباً كثيراً فزاره أحد العقال فلكرمه كما يجب ولم يترك شيء من اسباب ال�باء الا فعله معه الا امراته فانه فعل فعل الكفار ومنعها ان تؤدي الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب فجعل سيدنا عليه بالنقمة فاصبح هو وزوجته خزيرين ذكر وانثى واشتراهما احد النصارى الكفار وتعذباً في ذلك المصح سنين عدة واخيراً صارا جحدين في عتبة باب أحد الاسلام

(٤٩) (مكرمة)

لم يحصل عليها الا النصيرى بسر اعتقاده بسرع م س. وعبادته على ابن ابي طالب وهو سر وبشرى تلقىه إلى اخواننا في الدين من سائر المؤمنين بعل المكين اعلموا اخوانى ايهم الحق إلى الحق باتباع الحق إن الشرائع تكاليف وامتحانات القبيت عباءً ثقيلاً في عنق اصحاب القمحان البشرية لنقصانهم في الخلقية الانسانية وقوة سلطان الشهوات البشرية الشيطانية وجهلهم بحقيقة الذات الالهوية ونكرائهم الصورة الالهية الظاهرة بالهيئة العلوية

اما نحن معاشر المؤمنين من النصيرية لاقرارنا بعلى بن (٥٠) ابي طالب الاله وسطر الاشني عشر اماماً المرسلين للهدایة وهم المرتضى والمجتبى والشهيد والسجاد والباقي والصادق والكافر والرضا والتقوى والذكى واللحجة القائم المتضرر فقد حلتانا من قيد التكاليف واستراح لنا على بن ابي طالب فامر رسوله ان يبشرنا بذلك فخاطبنا بقوله "الْيَوْمَ أَحْلَثُ لِكُمُ الظَّبَابَاتِ" وقوله "قل من حرم زينة الله" وقوله "ليس لك عليهم سلطان" فكل طيب هولنا حلال وكل زينة هي لنا حلال وليس للشرعائ علينا سلطان فنهن نصلى لأن ذلك تكليف علينا ولكنه تقرب منا تطليمه قلوبنا قرباً إلى غايتها وغرضنا وتزوج لا بعقد ومن اعتقد بان ما يجري من صورة عقد النكاح عند التزوج بان ذلك فرض واجب فقد كفر ولكنه متابعة للشياطين الحاكمين الآن في الارض فالوطئ من النصيرى هو اجتهد لبذر بذور الزرع في أرض صالحة لتكثير ابناء (٥١) الطائفة فاي نصيرى احبته أرض واراد القاء بذر فيها طالباً زرعاً صالحآ لا يضره عن غرضه النافع ولذلك لم يجرم علينا كما حرم على غيرنا نكاح الامهات والاخوات والبنات وغيرهن ولكن نمنع اتباعاً لما [اصتصح] عليه الناس من ابناء جيلنا ولهذا ولكن لا

يرسم في الذهان في طویل الايام ان هذا الامتناع فرض كلف به النصيري وضع لنا عقلاءنا ومشايخنا ليلة الاباحة العامة وهي سر جليل رضى الله عن واضعيه واثاب [من نبها] الى الخير من اشياخنا ولم يتركوا لنا بابا للشك او النسيان

قالوا لنا فيما رواه الثقات انكم معاشر النصيرية اصبحتم شرذمة قليلة في وسط كفرة لئام فالالتزام مجازاتهم على كفرهم وبطليهم ومن ذلك انهم يحرمون الطيبات على انفسهم ويلزموكم بها ظلماً وعدواناً ومنها تحرم تناح الامهات والاخوات والبنات والحالات والعماالت وهذا مما لا يتفق مع السعة عليكم في الدين والدنيا فلم يمكنكم التظاهر بمخالفتهم ولكن رأفة بكم (٥٢) وحفظاً لدينكم وسلامة معتقدكم قد وضعنا لكم ما يرجحكم وينع عنكم كفافة ظلمات الكفر الا وهو ليلة الاباحة ليلة العبادة العظمى وهي ليلة التذكرة الصحيح فلتتجمع كل جماعة من نساء ورجال من بيت واحد او بيوت متعددة من اهل واقارب ولتدعوا أحد العقال وتظهروا وتقطيبوا وتزيينوا ظاهراً وباطناً واجتمعوا في قاعة واحدة وضعوا في وسط محل سراج مضاء بزيت الزيتون فهو مثال للنور الذي يحل عليكم أجمعين في تلك الليلة وليتقدم الذى من العقال ويقراء لكم صورة [sic] النور وستسمعوا واهتوا جداً بأمركم وعند الاتهاء من تلاوتها فليتقرب من السراج بخشوع وخضوع ولينادى تعس من كفر بك يا على ثم يطفأه لا بنفخه عليه من فيه ثم يقول لكم "اليوم احلت لكم الطيبات" فمن زرع زرعاً في تلك الليلة في اى ارض أراد كان زرعه صالح وتابجه صالحاً وجاء منه خلف صالح رضى طيب وامضوا تلك الليلة جميعها بسلام حتى مطلع الفجر " " "

(٥٣) فانها ليلة الطيبات وليلة القربات ويافوز من صالح زرعه تلك الليلة ويا هناء من أرضت زارع أرضها من النساء تلك الليلة "نساؤكم هرث لكم" فكل امراة نصيرية هي حرث لكم نصيري يأتي حرثه وقتها يشاء ولينا يريد فاي امراة امتنعت عن رجل يريد بذر زرعه في حرث ليصلحه وينخرج منه إنسان صالح فقد كفرت بالاهوت وجدت التعاليم الصالحة وانكرت سرع م س وتشبهت بالنساء الكافرات

(٥٤)
سُورَةُ النِّسَاءِ

ا ق م ذلك ايات للسامعين "لا يكُنْ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ حُرْجٌ وَلَا تَرْجِعُنَّ نِسَاءَكُمْ حَرْثَ لَكُمْ أَجْعَنْ فَأَتُوهُنَّ مَا حَرَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ طَيْبَاتٍ مَا تَتَكَبَّرُونَ وَلَا حَظَرْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِسَاءَ الْعَالَمِينَ فَإِنَّكُمْ حَوْلَ مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنْهُنَّ أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُاتُ لَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي أَخْوَاتِكُمْ وَأَمْهَاتِكُمْ وَخَالَاتِكُمْ وَبَنَاتِ

الاخ (٥٩) وبنات الأخت وان امراة مؤمنة منعت مؤمنا نفسها لها في الدنيا خرى وجزاها ربها اشر المسوخات وابتلاها بعض الوليات وستقاها من سعوم الجحيم واسكن نفسها اشر البهيم ومرت عليها ادوار السنين وهى في العذاب المقيم وأما من عبت بهدا الدين واهمل لازم الفرض العظيم فانا عنه ضنين والعبد عنه رحنى وارزقه عذابي وأقصه شر قصان واخذ منه ما وعدته من عهد وأمان وان امراة و هبت نفسها لاهل دينها و متعت اخوانها وواست رجالها كان الهباء لها وفازت بأمانها وأُوتيت رغباتها وغفر لها ما تقدم وما تأخر من ذنبها

يا ايها المؤمنات الصالحات القاتلات حافظوا على ما في بطونكم من الاولاد وأرضعوهم واحسنوا اليهم وهم اطفال في احضانكم وربوهم على عبادتى ومحبتي وعلموهم اسى وكتني وعودوهم من صغراهم حفظ اسرار شيعتى واهل عبادتى عسامهم يشفعوا لكم وينفعونكم وينقذونكم

(٦٠) فازت إمراة آمنت بالاسم الاعلى على الاعلى حيدرة الاسمى لا آكراء في الدين ولا ثريب عليكم اجمعين من يوم ان كتم اجنة في بطون امهاتكم وبعد ميلادكم ويوم موتكم وبعد حشركم او صينكم في اصلاب اباكم وبطون امهاتكم ان تحسنوا إلى نسائمكم وتأتونهن احسانكم ولا تميلوا عليهم كل الميل

النساء زينة لكم وهن فراش لكم فلا تغلوظوا لهن القول ان هن اطعنكم ولا تزوجوهن في غير ملتمكم ولا تسليموهن إلى غريب عن دياركم واحكموا فيهن غرسكم وامروهن ان يتطهين لكم ويتطهرن في بيتكم ولا يمنعكم اغراضكم وتأتونهن كسوتهن وطعامهن واغراضهن من زينتهن لا تقربوا النساء في مخاضهن فان ذلك اذى عليكم اجمعين

ايتها المرأة المؤمنة الصالحة الطاهرة الطيبة لا تمنع طالب زرع وغرس ثمر من المؤمنين قاطبة ولا تقولي بلسائك هذا حرام وهذا حلال احل وطئك (٦١) لا ينك واحبك وابنك وعمك وخالك وابن خالتك وخالك وابن عمتك وعمك وجارك وابن دينك فلا تحرمى أحد منهن ولا ترجى راغب من المؤمنين الموحدين المقربين بعلى الامين

انظرى إلى القمر وضياء ما اجمله واحلاه ما الذى جمله وحاله ربك على في علاه اضاء عليه من سناء واودعته صورته المسيحية العيساوية الهيئة فهو ينظر إليك منها ويعث عليك رضاه ويعتك بما تستهين وما انت تأملين

انظرى إلى الشمس ما أجملها وإلى نورها ما اعظمها وإلى هيتتها ما احسنها وإلى اشعتها من نشرها واحيا الأرض بها وجعل النهار مفرحا والقلوب منشرحة والنفوس منبسطة اضاء سناها بما أودعه فيها من حلاها وطيب جلاها انارها بوجهه العلوى اذ تربعت الصورة الحيدرية في وسط الشمس العلية ونظرت إلى المؤمنين والمؤمنات الصالحين والصالحات العاملين بدينه والعاملات

اطيعي ربك وخالقك وزوجك وطالبك وأمنحيه وأحمديه (٦٢) بعثنا لكم انباء ارسلنا لكم عقلاء اوجدنا فيكم حكماً فلا تقولوا جهلنا أمر ديننا فاسألهم واستشيروه وارضوه وحقوقهم أدوهم وواجباتهم أمنحوه واسمعوا لهم واطيعوه تفوزوا بالنعم ولا تخموه يوم الدين فانت أول المبعوثين واحسن الخلق أجمعين

ايه النساء سلطت عليكم الرجال فراضوهم واخدموهم واولادكم ربهم وبناتكم علموهم واجسادكم طهرواها ولباسكم نظفوها وبيوتكم احفظوها واقوال عقالكم أواعوها والكم راعوها واياكن والكذب واياكن والسرقة واياكن والعصيان فانكن ترکن للضد والمسخ والنسخ قردة تکن خنازير ترجعن احمر تمسخن عقارب وحيات تجعلن اقسمت بنفسی وبذاتی لان خالفتن أمری في سرکن واعلانکن لاتقمن منکن ولا جعلنکن مثلات قبیحات رذیلات احذرن افساء اسرارکن واسرار ابناء طائفتکن انکن ناقصات عقا وديننا (٦٣) فلا يغرنکن غریب عنکن فتبدون له ما اتن کاتمیه ومامورات بمحفظه ان هذا لهو الخسنان المین . وان امراة افشت بسرها إلى غير ملتها فالولی لها عذابا في الدنيا وعقابا شديدا لا تجد لها عنه حیصاً والندامة لا تنفع والحسنة لا تدفع غضبی الشدید اصبه عليها صبا ومکری البعید آزیها به عقابا واتقاما

ايه المؤمنة الصالحة ارضی بما اوقيت من قسمة وحظ وما قدر لك من عيش الدنيا ولا تخرجی زوجك بطلبك فعل المسر قدره وعلى المسر قدره لا يكلف اليه نفسا الا وسعها

ايه المؤمن اذا نکحت امراة فانها اجرها بنفس طيبة ولا تطمع فيها آيتها وانفق عليها كما تتفق على نفسك ان البخلاء والمترفين والذين يتبعون زوجاتهم لهم في الدنيا خزى وفي الآخرة خزى يعقبه عذاب أليم في نار جهنم ان نارها موقدة لا تهدى ولا تحمد ولا تغور ولا تدور

(٦٤) انا منع[ن]كم ما حملناه الناس أجمعين فلم نكلفك شرعا ولا كفته فافرحوا بما آتيناكم واشكروا ما مننا عليكم به انكم قوم مباؤن وبررة معظمون لا تثيّب عليكم فاعبدوني وراعوني واحفظوني حططت عنكم ما حملته غيركم فراعوني في الذي جعلتكم عليه امناء وجعلته في يدكم رق واسير فلما رحمتكم فارحموا وكما غفرت لكم فاغفروا النساء ضعيفات فاحرسوهن وهن فقيرات فاغنوهن وهن رقيقات فشجعوهن وجاهلات فعلوهن وعندكم آمانة فاحفظوهن ولا توضلوهن ولا تأذوهن وصية مني اليكم فلا تنسوها ولا تخالفوها ولا تقولوا انسانا الشيطان فان ذلك عليكم خسران ”

وان امراة او هيتك نفسها فلا تخزها ولا تغضبها ولا تنفرها وقل لها قولًا معروفا وخذها بالغفو والحلم عليها انها ضعيفة فلا تكسرها ولا تخيب رجاهـاـ . وصية مني اوصيت بها اباعكم واجدادكم في أول خلقتم فلا تزيدوا (٦٥) عليكم غضبي عسى أن اقصر مدتم في بشريكم وارضي عنكم وابعد شر التقصص عن اخلاقكم وذرتيكم وتعودون بسلام إلى السلام في جوادى وحيتي ونعمى وانا على في الاولين وعلى في الآخرين ولم ينكري الا الضالين

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Crone and the End of Orientalism

Chase F. Robinson

Readers of this volume may well be familiar with the range of tropes, found especially in Arabic biographical dictionaries, which describe a given scholar's immense learning and erudition, inexhaustible industry, and definitive, comprehensive or trenchant contributions to branches of Islamic learning. None shall be employed here because none does the honoree's achievement full justice. Besides, she loathes clichés.¹ I accordingly abdicate my responsibility as laudator, clichéd or otherwise. Instead – and in deep respect for her scholarly temperament – I should like to *argue* a case. The case is that the professional study of early Islamic history changed essentially between *ca* 1975 and 1990, and that although this reshaping was a collective project, Crone's work above all determined it, and, in some respects, continues to do so.

Now insofar as this change is characterized as a shift in perspective, greater “skepticism” or, more narrowly, a privileging of one set of sources for another, this, too, may not come as much of a surprise to some of the volume's readers. After all, it is Crone who appears in a “fictitious dialog” between a *shaykh* and *tālib*, which is intended to discredit a skeptical position on the transmission of material in Prophetic biography.² How many Islamicists can claim such celebrity? But this characterization grossly minimizes things, for what was (and remains) at stake was more than the soundness of *hadīth* or *sīra*, as the title of this contribution suggests. In fact, narrowing the scope of change to how one reads evidence (or in what language) recycles the very terms of Orientalist reference that Crone so spectacularly exposed. She was the principal force in dislodging something like a disciplinary *habitus*, I shall argue, because her project was more ambitious and far-reaching.

¹ This is obvious to anyone who has read Crone, but some of us have had the experience of learning the lesson the hard way. “Why must everything vibrate?” she once asked of a draft of mine that used “vibrant” at least one too many times.

² Schoeler, *The Biography of Muḥammad*, 120. It is worth noting that authority is inscribed into the shape of the dialog itself: the skeptical position is attributed to the naïve, Crone-referencing *tālib*, who is reduced to temporizing silence by the patronizing *shaykh*. One would have to be obtuse to deny that shadows of culture, generation and gender darken at least some of the occasionally rancorous debate about Islamic origins.

For all the antecedents, precedents and continuities that must necessarily qualify an argument for rapid and profound historiographic change, it can safely be said that no period in the history of *Islamwissenschaft* rivals in originality the decade that began with *Hagarism* (1977), and ended with *Meccan Trade* and *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law* (1987), via *Slaves on Horses* (1980), and *God's Caliph* (1986).³ It was chiefly because of Crone's serial assaults on a range of scholarly orthodoxies that a settled consensus about early Islamic history – what questions were to be asked, how they were to be answered, and what, for the most part, the answers were – was overturned. Implicitly and explicitly comparative, and unremittingly dialectical, the assaults demolished orthodoxies because their very methods repudiated so many of mainstream Orientalism's unspoken rules: not just its self-regulating authoritarianism or disciplinary insularity, but also what might be called its philological gnosticism – the practice of narrating as history more-or-less self-evident truths embedded in culturally valorized texts.

The claim that a disciplinary *habitus* was abandoned is a bold one, and I shall not be able to substantiate it to the satisfaction of all my readers. I freely concede that the following merely outlines the shape of an argument that it is premature to make in full. For one thing, the impact of revisionism takes time to work through the system. "Looking at things in new ways is very hard, much harder than our garden-variety histories of scholarship suggest," writes Marchand in her exhaustive survey of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German scholarship on the Orient.⁴ For another, a framework for understanding mid- to late twentieth-century European and North American scholarship on the pre-modern Middle East or Islam has not yet been assembled.⁵ That scholarship is inflected by political culture is a truism, of course;⁶ but how, for instance, post-War American "engagement" with the Middle East set it apart from British, French, and German varieties, freed as they became of the con-

³ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*; Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*; Crone, *Meccan Trade*, and *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*.

⁴ "Even after the publication of a path-breaking book, many are left fumbling in the dark, without the proper resources or training to switch gears; many will have to finish old research projects even though they are obsolete simply because they are too far along to abandon them." See Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, 217.

⁵ There is a well known and steady stream of research on modern Middle Eastern studies (thus Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*), and a less well known and rising tide of scholarship on Islamic studies before the Second War, such as Haridi, *Das Paradigma der "islamischen Zivilisation"*, but too little has been written about twentieth-century scholarship; for now, see Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*.

⁶ For just how profoundly instrumental scholarship on the Middle East and Islam is supposed to be, see Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand*.

straints of imperial entanglement, remains an open question. But given the modest number of scholars working in a small handful of academic networks, one may not need political culture to explain why a tired field's regeneration began where it did. Be this as it may, there is no question that the dominant strain until the mid-1970s was deeply conservative – even complacent and self-satisfied, as we shall see. Since it was against that conservatism that the tide was turned, it is with it that we can make a proper start to this appreciation of Crone's contributions.

1

In 1974 Crone completed her PhD dissertation under the supervision of B. Lewis,⁷ already celebrated as the author of *The Arabs in History*, which was written in 1947 and published in 1950; by 1973 it had appeared in the fifth of its six editions, and it remains in print to this day, lightly revised, some 65 years after its original publication, available in multiple platforms and translations, the most recent apparently being an Uighur e-book.⁸ At once authoritative and concise, it showcases Lewis's extraordinary linguistic and historical range; and adorned with epigrams credited to Isaiah, God, Tennyson, Ṭabarī, Rimbaud, and Marlowe (amongst others), it effortlessly exudes the transcendent command of history and culture that was once a mark of British Orientalism. It also captures, in miniature, what was then the settled consensus on the essential shape of Islamic history in Anglo-American scholarship, both conceptual and chronological: his is an untroubled narrative of the rise and decline of a civilization, framed largely (though not exclusively) in ethnic and political terms. In other words, the little book's big and enduring success cannot be understood properly unless one concedes that it introduces its readers to an Islamic-Middle Eastern culture without disturbing what was in many respects a nineteenth-century template of history.

In fact, *The Arabs in History* documents a disciplinary inertia that is nothing short of staggering.⁹ It is both a tribute to Lewis's powers of synthesis and a diagnostic of so much of Orientalism's torpor that *The Arabs in History* can be read as an epitome of much of *The Cambridge History of Islam*, which

7 Crone, "The Mawali in the Umayyad Period."

8 Lewis, *The Arabs in History*.

9 Cf. Hitti's symmetrically titled *History of the Arabs*, an 822-page "modest attempt to tell the story of the Arabians and Arabic speaking peoples," which, first published in London in 1939, had reached its fourth edition by 1949.

appeared in 1970, some 33 years later;¹⁰ this is the case in both vision and narrative effect.¹¹ Implicated as I am in the volumes that succeeded this effort, I will be the first to concede that every Cambridge history is by its very nature something of a Frankenstein's monster, its oft-recycled limbs re-animated by dubious science.¹² And because Cambridge histories conventionally function as authoritative statements about the state of a given field, they often serve as lightning rods for sharp and sometime interneccine criticism. What better way for a Young Turk to make a name? In this case, however, the reception was especially brutal. Almost immediately the *Cambridge History of Islam* was recognized as obsolete in both conception and execution.¹³ The *coup de grâce* was delivered by R. Owen, whose excoriating review describes a lifeless beast of a project, one pervaded by a “general sense of omniscience,” and a “malaise” caused by disciplinary insularity; until disabused of their fixation upon “civilization” as the unit of historical analysis, Orientalists were unlikely to produce sophisticated history.¹⁴

The rude reception should not have come as a complete surprise. I do not need to rehearse in full how methods and conclusions that subverted Orientalism’s positivist consensus – an accepted framework of questions about (and sources for) where “Islam” came from, or who Muhammad was, about the basic chronology and essential nature of early Islamic institution- and state-building, or the origins of orthodoxy or orthopraxy – had been marginalized. One can point to the paradox that was I. Goldziher (d. 1921). Issuing from the creative fusion of Talmudic study and *Religionsgeschichte*,¹⁵ his brilliance was recognized by contemporaries, but the results of his *hadīth* criticism were largely wished away for decades. For his part, J. Schacht (not without some bitterness and self-interest) was “astonished” by the profession’s failure to develop

¹⁰ Holt, Lambton, and Lewis (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 1A*.

¹¹ Thus the acute Arkoun in his review of *The Cambridge History of Islam*, 97: “En somme, *The Cambridge History of Islam* se présente non seulement comme un état actuel des connaissances sur l’histoire de l’Islam, mais aussi comme la consécration d’une forme de la connaissance historique, d’un mode de détermination, d’interrogation et de retranscription des documents (en majorité écrits).”

¹² Cook et al. (eds.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam*.

¹³ In addition to Arkoun, see Roux’s long diatribe, at once querulous and trenchant, in his review of *The Cambridge History of Islam*. Even one of the project’s contributors, Claude Cahen, could not resist taking some swipes in a review that appeared in the *Revue Historique*.

¹⁴ Owen, “Studying Islamic History”; always the gentleman, Albert Hourani was more polite in *The English Historical Review*, but his frustration was thinly disguised.

¹⁵ Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, 329.

his own lines of criticism, aligning his rough treatment at the hands of N. J. Coulson with that of the Hungarian master: “[W]hat happened in the past to the work of Goldziher had happened again, recently, with regard to the conclusions . . . achieved by critical scholarship,” he wrote.¹⁶ One can also point to the case of J. Wellhausen (d. 1918), whose source criticism of early *akhbār* was abandoned, at least until rekindled by A. Noth (d. 1999), whose *nasab* meant that he could scarcely have escaped the influence of such criticism.¹⁷ And, finally, one can point to the criticism of the historicity of Prophetic *sīra* leveled by the ill-tempered H. Lammens (d. 1937), or the consequences of the dissertation written in the 1920s by J. Fück (d. 1974) on the transmission history of Ibn Iṣhāq;¹⁸ 40, 50, or 60 years could go by before they were taken up.¹⁹ The most generous reading of the situation would grant that German *Arabistik* was slightly less lethargic in the 1960s, at least insofar as it generated some literary criticism of *ḥadīth* and *akhbār*,²⁰ and form criticism of the *sīra*.²¹ According to this reading, the Islamic historical tradition was starting to come into focus as primary in the sense that, understood properly, it shed light on the circumstances of its secondary development. What it was not was a repository of accounts that accurately documented the events that they purport to relate: it told us about

¹⁶ As has been well documented, the resistance came not only from Coulson, but also from Gibb and Watt, who chose to avoid engaging Schacht’s arguments. For a discussion (and the quotation), see Wakin, “Remembering Joseph Schacht (1902–1969),” 29–30; for Schacht’s opponents, see Forte, “Islamic Law: the Impact of Joseph Schacht”; see also Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 14, and Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, 123, note 59.

¹⁷ Noth, “Der Charakter,” and *Quellenkritische Studien*, which is revised and translated as Noth and Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*. (The father was Martin Noth [d. 1968], theologian and Old Testament critic.) See also Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 14. Shahid (*Byzantium and the Arabs*, vol. 2, part 1, 291) speaks dismissively of a “Hamburg school,” but I know of no such *madhab*.

¹⁸ Lammens, “Qoran et tradition: comment fut composée la vie de Mahomet,” and “L’Âge de Mahomet et la chronologie de la *sīra*;” Fück, “Muhammad ibn Ishaq: literarhistorische Untersuchungen.”

¹⁹ See, *inter alia*, Conrad, “Abraha and Muhammad.”

²⁰ Thus Stetter’s study of al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, “Topoi und Schemata im Ḥadīt,” which prefigures Noth’s *Quellenkritische Studien*, and had obvious consequences for *ḥadīth* criticism; see Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, 17.

²¹ Fück’s work was extended by Sellheim, “Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte,” which was followed up a decade later by his student, al-Samuk, “Die historischen Überlieferungen nach Ibn Iṣhāq” (such as it is, post-Fück scholarship on *sīra* to the late 1970s is discussed on 4–16).

the eighth and ninth centuries, not the seventh. Even so, the norm was decades of *décalage* between critical insight and systematic progress.²²

The scholarly somnolence that I have described belongs to a very different time, one that is difficult to conjure now. The story circulates widely that H. A. R. Gibb (one of Lewis's teachers) reported that he was still learning Arabic 40 years after starting it;²³ he was recycling a monotheist stereotype of "multitude and prediction"²⁴ and, much more significantly, monitoring an academic frontier. For joining the Orientalist guild required paying one's dues – not merely endless years of language study, but the acculturation of broader disciplinary norms. Chief amongst these was the framing expectation, which was itself based on intellectual and cultural pre-commitments about the nature of philology, literature, and society, that the project of reconstructing Islam was essentially transcriptional – about setting an Islamic score to Western instrumentation, one might say. Because the sources were held to constitute a reasonable, coherent, and (not coincidentally) largely Sunni consensus,²⁵ the scholarly project was by definition conservative; the framework created by those sources being fundamentally sound, this boiled down to introducing new details, texts and figures, and qualifying and adjusting subordinate interpretations. All this goes some way towards explaining why so much of the most path-breaking work in the post-War period was disproportionately produced not by members of the European Orientalist establishment (there was no American one to speak of),²⁶ but by those who worked either on its margins or entirely outside of it. The body of evidence was not necessarily changing, but because they were drawing upon fresh ideas and approaches, historical materialists (Annaliste, Marxist, or otherwise, such as C. Cahen, M. Rodinson and M. Lombard), along with other non-conformists (such as M. G. S. Hodgson), were breaking new ground. Predictably, much of their work was ignored.²⁷

²² There are several other examples, but an especially telling one is the failure to pursue the perspicacious Brunschvig, "Ibn 'Abdalhakam et la conquête de l'Afrique du nord."

²³ According to Irwin (*For Lust of Knowing*, 325), in the 1960s Oxford students were set the essay topic "What explains Muhammad's success?" When I arrived there in 1993 it was still being set by some tutors.

²⁴ Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad," 230–3.

²⁵ On Gibb's view (following Goldziher) of Shi'ism as an "adversarial cult," see Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 242.

²⁶ For the very shallow roots there, see Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 213–14 and 245–7.

²⁷ As noted by Crone herself in *Slaves on Horses*, 212–13, note 97.

Crone's and Cook's *Hagarism* appeared in 1977, a "pretentious humbug" in the words of one especially rattled reviewer.²⁸ It proposed that Muḥammad led a messianic movement of Jews and Arabs towards Jerusalem, and that the history of this conquest movement was radically transformed, starting in the late seventh century, into the myth of origins that was (and is) consecrated in (and by) the Islamic historical tradition. The reconstruction has enjoyed little popularity – and not just because it was an unfamiliar argument expressed in a peppery style; it can also be said to have substituted a large corpus of late and tendentious literary representations with a small corpus of early, but manifestly polemical literary representations.²⁹ R. B. Serjeant may have been amongst the most patronizing of the work's critics, but in both method and conclusions the book was widely panned by the Orientalist establishment.³⁰

In pairing *Hagarism* with Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* – the two were "foaled in the same stable," as he evocatively puts it – Serjeant was probably the first to express what has since become a common misunderstanding, viz., that "revisionists" or "skeptics" are more or less all of a piece,³¹ or belong to the same "school." Of course Crone and Cook owed a deep debt to Wansbrough's thinking, but Wansbrough himself made his own views clear about *Hagarism*,³² and, more generally, about the prospects for historical reconstruction, Hagarine or otherwise: they were very dim indeed, the relevant accounts being "incarcerated in a grammar designed to stress the immediate equivalence of word and world," as he so memorably put it.³³ His was a textual austerity that rejected the conventional relationship between signified and putative referent, and so

²⁸ Serjeant in his review in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 76–8.

²⁹ A fair-minded recapitulation (and rejection) can be found in Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 47–59.

³⁰ As Donner understated it 30 years later (in the *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 197–9), the book "came as a very loud wake-up call to the then rather sleepy field of early Islamic studies and, like most wake-up calls, its arrival was not exactly welcomed."

³¹ The collapsing of diverse hermeneutic attitudes into a single "skeptical" or "revisionist" position is a chronic source of confusion; for one discussion, see Robinson, "The Ideological Uses of Islam," 205–28.

³² Where he takes the authors to task for their "methodological assumptions, of which the principal must be that a vocabulary of motives can be freely extrapolated from a discrete collection of literary stereotypes composed by alien and mostly hostile observers"; see Serjeant's review of *Hagarism*, 155–6.

³³ Wansbrough, "Res ipsa loquitur: History and Mimesis," which is reprinted in *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, 162.

had little in common with Crone's (and Cook's) pragmatic skepticism. For her part, Crone was to make equally clear her objections not only to Wansbrough's most notorious argument for the late crystallization of the Qur'anic text,³⁴ but also to his exiling of Islamic origins from an Arabian setting.³⁵ The question of when the Qur'ān achieves agency upon the law is one thing;³⁶ but that it provides for Crone reliable information about the religious and social setting of Arabian Muslims can hardly be doubted.³⁷ In sum, anyone who thinks at all deeply about Wansbrough's work will recognize how distant his interests lay from Crone's, especially as her ideas evolved during the 1990s.

An obvious source of this and other confusion is *Hagarism*'s terseness – sometimes even its gnomic quality. Opening the book is akin to entering a conversation *in medias res*: the historiographical assumptions that undergird the argument, forged in Bloomsbury in the early 1970s, were only fleshed out in subsequent works that appeared in the 1980s, especially *Slaves on Horses* and *Meccan Trade* in Crone's case, *Muhammad* in Cook's.³⁸ There (and elsewhere) no room is left for doubt. "The entire tradition is tendentious, its aim being the elaboration of an Arabian *Heilsgeschichte*, and this tendentiousness has shaped the facts as we have them, not merely added some partisan statements that we can deduct. Without correctives from outside the Islamic tradition, such as papyri, archaeological evidence, and non-Muslim sources, we have little hope of reconstituting the original shape of this early period."³⁹ Historiographic skepticism had been in the air, but never had it been delivered with such concussive force: *Hagarism*, *Slaves on Horses*, *Meccan Trade*, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, and *God's Caliph* hammered not only at the central planks of that *Heilsgeschichte*, but also the elaboration of the political and intellectual traditions in the eighth and ninth centuries, as we shall see.

Language, model, and evidence delivered the blows. Much could be said about Crone's style, particularly what might be called its "prosecutorial rhetoric." Question-posing is very common across academic prose, of course, but in her

³⁴ Here it is worth noting in passing that Cook's reconstruction of the 'Uthmānic skeleton is hardly compatible with Wansbrough's model of gradual crystallization; see Cook, "Stemma of the Regional Codices."

³⁵ See, for example, Crone, "Two Legal Problems," 16 (esp. note 48). Some of the landscape is concisely and accessibly surveyed by Donner, "The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship."

³⁶ Crone, "Two Legal Problems."

³⁷ Crone, "How Did the Quranic Pagans Make a Living?"; Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans."

³⁸ Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 3–17; Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 203–29; Cook, *Muhammad*, 61–76.

³⁹ Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 230.

hands it is uncommonly potent, not merely inaugurating argument (especially by addressing the *status quaestionis*), but also propelling and steering it. “What was the nature of the early caliphate?”, “How much, and in what way, did the customary law of the pre-Islamic Arabs contribute to Islamic law?”, “How long did the Khārijites continue to call their imams *khalifa* and *amīr al-mu’minīn*?”, “Having unlearnt most of what we knew about Meccan trade, do we find ourselves deprived of our capacity to explain the rise of Islam?”⁴⁰ The question framed, the interrogation begins: witnesses (sources) are probed, stories are checked out, probabilities measured. A particularly good example of discrediting a witness appears in *Meccan Trade*, where she sets a jackhammer into the exegetical foundations of the *sīra*. The Qur’ān alludes to a journey in Sūrat Quraysh, but what are we to make of the accounts that explain it? The answer is worth reproducing nearly in full:

The journeys, we are told, were the greater and lesser pilgrimages to Mecca: the *hajj* in Dhū'l-hijja and the *'umra* in Rajab. Alternatively, they were the migrations of Quraysh to Ṭā'if in the summer and their return to Mecca in the winter. Or else they were Qurayshī trading journeys. Most exegetes hold them to have been trading journeys, but where did they go? Then went to Syria, we are told: Quraysh would travel by the hot coastal route to Ayla in the winter and by the cool inland route to Buṣrā and Adhriāt in the summer. Or else they went to Syria and somewhere else, such as Syria and Rūm, however that is to be understood, or Syria and the Yemen, as is more commonly said: Quraysh would go to Syria in the summer and to the Yemen in the winter, when Syria was too cold, or else to Syria in the winter and the Yemen in the summer, when the route to Syria was too hot. Alternatively….

In short, the sura refers to the fact that Quraysh used to trade in Syria, or in Syria and the Yemen, or in Syria and Ethiopia, or in all three, and maybe also in Iraq, or else to their habit of spending the summer in Ṭā'if, or else to ritual visits to Mecca. It celebrates the fact that they began to trade, or that they continued to do so, or that they stopped; or else it does not refer to trade at all.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 1; Crone, “Jāhilī and Jewish Law: The *Qasāma*,” 153–201 at 153; Crone, “The Khārijites and the Caliphal Title,” 85–91 at 85; Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 231.

⁴¹ Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 205–9.

Cataloging the tradition's inconsistencies had never been carried out with such devastating results.⁴² Imagery serves to rouse, rile, and provoke: early Islamic history is a "whirlwind," and what remains is "rubble," "dust," and "debris from an obliterated past"; the *Kitāb al-muhabbar* "rank[s] with the *Guinness Book of Records* among the greatest compilations of useless information"; early Muslim lawyers suffer from "collective amnesia."⁴³ From this perspective, her prodigious referencing – those avalanches of notes that plow through conventional wisdom and anticipate counter-argument – serves not merely to document and substantiate in exhaustive detail, or surface problems and ventilate debates.⁴⁴ The notes are also the equivalent of the prosecutor's binders, thumping theatrically upon the courtroom table.

If the sources narrate *Heilsgeschichte*, the most salient features of which are the Arabian origins of monotheist preaching and the articulation of a proto-Sunni political order, how is one to write genuine history? Here it must be underlined that skepticism about the preservation of authentic, seventh-century material in eighth-, ninth- and tenth-century sources is not simply a matter of disposition or temperament. To be sure, Crone both reflected (and propelled) a trend discernible across several fields of pre-modern history towards accepting the limitations of evidence and deplored the hubris of historians who pretend that things are otherwise. "The natural vice of historians is to claim to know about the past,"⁴⁵ is how one western medievalist has responded to the paucity of contemporaneous evidence for regions of the post-Roman west. W. Raven puts it nicely, speaking of the *horror vacui* that leads some scholars, despite all the obstacles, to mine for facts in *sīra* and non-*sīra* material that stands at several generational, cultural, and geographic removes from Muḥammad's west Arabia.⁴⁶ This said, Crone's skepticism is grounded in a deeper critique of Orientalist positivism, especially its implicit

⁴² Cf. Kister, "The Expedition of Bi'r Ma'ūna," 346: "In summary, it may be said that the traditions about this expedition are contradictory as to whether the expedition was a peaceful one sent to teach Islam and the Koran, or a military enterprise; whether it was sent to the Banū 'Āmir or to Sulaim; whether the members of the expedition were slain by clans of Sulaim, by clans of 'Āmir b. Ša'sa'a, by clans of Sulaim led by 'Āmir b. al-Ṭufail; or by a man of Sulaim; whether the 'Āmir b. Ša'sa'a opposed the relations between Abū Bara' and the Prophet or supported it."

⁴³ Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 6–10; Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, 98.

⁴⁴ Thus *Slaves on Horses* features 91 pages of text, followed by 6 appendices (in 107 pages – entirely dominated by references), which are followed by no fewer than 711 endnotes spread across 70 pages. Cf. Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law* (4 appendices, etc.).

⁴⁵ Howe, "Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void," 25–47.

⁴⁶ Raven, "Sīra," *EI*².

exceptionalism, its imperviousness to model-building, and the insights (some obvious, some less) that come with understanding social change as the product of both the particular and the universal. “I have simply refused to treat the Arabs as an exception to the normal rules of history, and something is badly wrong in Islamic studies if I have to *justify* this procedure,” she wrote in response to an especially offended member of the Arabist old guard.⁴⁷ It would be folly to try to encapsulate thousands of pages of scholarship within a single sentence, but this may be as close as one can come.

Strange as it may sound, to understand Crone’s approach to Islamic history one is well advised to read what she has to say about non-Islamic history, especially about the state, politics and religion.⁴⁸ Doing so clarifies her terms of historical and sociological analysis (e.g., “barbarian,” “religion”), as well as her materialism; perhaps even more important, it reveals a framework of understanding the patterns of pre-modern global history. What one also finds, *inter alia*, is an inversion of Orientalist presumptions: it is early modern Europe that presents the “oddity,” the Islamic Middle East an elaboration of the norm.⁴⁹ From this perspective, the argumentative rhetoric of *Slaves on Horses*, etc., can be seen as an admonition that the field should be arguing about Islamic history not within its own terms, but as a series of problems that constitute one trajectory – the spread of a monotheist religio-political tradition within the late antique Middle East – that is itself one variation of pre-modern history. *Slaves on Horses* consigns Wellhausen’s venerable *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz* to obsolescence in part because it offers a better understanding of Umayyad factionalism (and the like),⁵⁰ but in larger part because it frames the Sufyānid-Marwānid-Abbasid narrative as an ongoing (and unsuccessful) set of solutions to the central challenge of early Islam: how, in the absence of sophisticated ruling traditions of their own, were Muslims to institutionalize God’s dispensation without assimilating the traditions that they had replaced? This is why adducing Icelandic sagas (to take one of many examples) is not the performance of erudition,⁵¹ although that erudition – or, more precisely, the combination of erudition and industry – is stupefying. (Surely I am not the only one to arrive at an article’s end punch-drunk, or to have been dumfounded to

⁴⁷ Crone, “Serjeant and Meccan Trade,” 240.

⁴⁸ Crone, *Pre-industrial Societies*.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Crone, *Pre-industrial Societies*, 147.

⁵⁰ Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz*, which is translated as *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*.

⁵¹ Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 8–9.

learn that her field of knowledge encompasses various species of baboons?)⁵² Rather, such referencing is about drawing parallels and comparisons in order to isolate what is distinctive (sometimes even remarkable) in Islamic history.

What all this means is that reconstructing history is more than a matter of identifying what is reliable. A first step, of course, is controlling for date, provenance or perspective, such as by relying exclusively or chiefly upon the testimony of sources that provide alternatives to the Arabo-Islamic *Heilsgeschichte*, such as Syriac or Hebrew apocalypses, pre-canonical *hadīth*, papyri, coins, documents, and poetry, or, for that matter, traditions that lie outside of the Sunni mainstream.⁵³ But reconstructing history is also a matter of identifying the most promising fit between evidence and model. An egregious case of misfit, one in which bad evidence is imposed badly upon social setting, is Watt's interpretation of Muḥammad's program in the Ḥijāz: Watt was wrong not merely because he was reading the sources credulously, but because his model of west Arabian society was laughably anachronistic. "Watt's desire to find social malaise in the desert would have been more convincing if the Meccans had been members of OPEC rather than the *hilf al-fuḍūl*."⁵⁴ R. Dussaud may have thought the "problem of Muḥammad" solved by "les arabisants,"⁵⁵ but Crone knew that *historians* had scarcely addressed it as such, and so, in stark contrast to Watt's view, what is provisionally offered as a solution to the "problem" of Meccan trade seeks to align the available evidence, duly evaluated, with the appropriate model.⁵⁶ To make sense of the marriage of prophecy and conquest in early seventh-century Arabia, one should thus look to comparable moments of human history in which alien domination triggered primitive political action – that is, nativist movements.

Comparisons pay dividends. To my mind, *God's Caliph* is the most exciting and consequential work of early Islamic history written over the last half century, and it packs its extraordinary punch because it applies evidence to model so effectively. Of course Watt and Schacht (amongst others) had set the groundwork for challenging the classical Sunni view on the Umayyad and early Abbasid caliphate,⁵⁷ but it was Crone and Hinds who recognized how deeply

⁵² Cook, "Ibn Qutayba and the Monkeys," 66, note 97.

⁵³ Such as in Crone and Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Sālim Ibn Dhakwān*.

⁵⁴ Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 209, note 71 (where Shaban is guilty of the same).

⁵⁵ Thus his review of Blachère's *Le Problème de Mahomet*, 163.

⁵⁶ Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 4.

⁵⁷ Watt, "God's Caliph: Qur'ānic Interpretations and Umayyad Claims," which is reprinted in Watt, *Early Islam: Collected Articles*; Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*.

the jurists' and traditionists' views had misrepresented things, especially by denuding legislating and salvific caliphs of their religious authority. As they show in exacting detail, documentary, numismatic, and literary evidence, all of which can be dated to the seventh and eighth centuries, documents a pre-classical conception of God's Deputyship rooted in (and legitimated by) Muhammad's indivisible authority.⁵⁸ What results is a genuinely radical revision of the state's governing institution,⁵⁹ along with a striking recasting of early Islamic religious history, in which the genealogies of orthodox and heterodox positions are re-mapped: the Sunni construction of the caliphate is shown to be a departure, the Imami conception an "archaism rather than an innovation."⁶⁰ Had Walter Bauer been an Islamicist, he might well have shown the same.

That the origins and evolution of early Islam *constitute problems* may sound banal, but as pursued by Crone they ramify in several main, sometimes intersecting, but always interesting lines of inquiry. One concerns how tribes relate to states, including how tribes turn into states;⁶¹ in the case of the birth of Islam in its tribal environment, the work of "unlearning" initiated by *Meccan Trade* has now yielded to a re-appraisal of trade as a source of both wealth and information.⁶² Another is about incorporation, especially the social practice and legal institution of clientage;⁶³ since the genesis of *walā'* is predictably murky, the inquiry necessarily leads to the vexing and controversial question of how Islamic law relates to pre-Islamic and contemporary legal traditions (Jāhilī, Roman, provincial, and Jewish). A third addresses colonialism and how natives respond to it.⁶⁴ A fourth is about rulership and the law, both in theory and practice.⁶⁵ Still another, closely related in some respects, aims to describe

58 Whatever the ultimate inspiration for the idea may be; see Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 11–15; and Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 40.

59 The caliphate would remain near or at the heart of future work on political thought; see below, note 63.

60 Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 99.

61 Thus, for example, Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 18; Crone, "The Tribe and the State"; Crone, "Tribes and States in the Middle East."

62 Crone, "Quraysh and the Roman Army."

63 Thus, Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 49–57; Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*; Crone, "Mawāli and the Prophet's Family"; Crone, "The Pay of Client Soldiers."

64 Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 247–52; Crone, "Imperial Trauma: The Case of the Arabs"; Crone, "Post-colonialism in Tenth-century Islam"; and Crone, *Nativist Prophets*.

65 Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*; Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*.

the evolution of religious ideas, especially by throwing into doubt orthodox truisms.⁶⁶

In sum, behind the “combination of holy law and learned laity”⁶⁷ that may be said to characterize classical Islam lies a multitude of ideas, movements, practices, and institutions. Some were compelling only in the short term, others enduring; but in one way or another they were all formed by history, especially the articulation of an Islamic political order. One can agree or disagree with specific assertions or arguments, but there is no denying the overall impression created by her body of work: early Islam was more contentious, more controversial, and more creative than most Orientalists could ever have imagined.

3

This last point has obvious significance not just for reconstructing early Islamic history, but also for the present.

Things have changed over the last 40 years or so. As is well known, across the humanities and social sciences, all manner of literary and cultural critiques have thrown into doubt a wide range of certainties, both methodological and substantive (if one is allowed to posit such a crude dichotomy). Meanwhile, in our networked and globalized world, digital technology now narrows to seconds and minutes the time between event reported (or book published) and opinion voiced, creating a virtually infinite public sphere for scholarly and cultural debate. In the case of Islam and the Middle East, the debates have been driven mainly by state and non-state violence, demographic change within Europe (especially resulting from Muslim immigration), and the emergence of new varieties of Islamic political thought, some still theoretical, some finding application in Middle Eastern states. Sometimes the debates are sterile or substantive, still other times even existential. What will become of the “West” if its religio-cultural-legal traditions fail to withstand the effects of Muslim immigration? How does one engineer an “Islam” that will prosper in multicultural and democratic societies, especially given the rise of conservative, even militant Islamism? Since past practice is commonly adduced to answer these

66 Of several examples, an especially good one is Crone, “The First-Century Concept of Hiğra.”

67 Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 30.

and other questions, it is little wonder that Islamic history matters more and more.⁶⁸

The demand for information and understanding having grown so, supply has accordingly adjusted; and the stakes being so high (at least for some), the din of polemics has risen as well. In some respects, these are the best and worst of times for Islamic studies. At their worst, the polemics recycle perennial aspersions: Muhammad did not exist or is an imposter;⁶⁹ the Qur'an is a sham text.⁷⁰ Islam discredited, the West is best, or so we are supposed to conclude. On the other hand, more scholars and students study early Islam than ever before, accessing online tools and data that used to be the preserve of graduate seminars. Debates about Qur'an manuscripts, once limited to Orientalists' correspondence and the like, now appear in mass-market magazines and newspapers.⁷¹ In the early 1970s, an unlikely argument about the Christian origins of the Qur'an was ignored outside of a small circle of scholars;⁷² by the early 2000s, a pseudonymous book, also on the Christian origins of the Qur'an, could generate multiple editions, a translation, and a collected volume, not to mention innumerable blogs, all in a matter of a few years.⁷³ In 1961, with Watt's biography still casting a long shadow, Rodinson looked across about 25 years of scholarship on Muhammad, and thought eight monographs worth mentioning.⁷⁴ Over the last four years or so alone one can count many more than that, some proposing radically new views,⁷⁵ others holding to fairly conventional lines.⁷⁶

68 Thus An-Naim (*Islam and the Secular State*, 45), where he sets out to show that his "proposal for a secular state is more consistent with Islamic history than is the so-called Islamic state model proposed by some Muslims since the second quarter of the twentieth century."

69 Spencer, *The Truth about Muhammad*, and his *Did Muhammad Exist?*

70 For example, Ibn Warraq, *Virgins? What Virgins?*

71 Lester, "What is the Koran?"; Lester, "The Lost Archive."

72 Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'an*: a revised version and translation appeared 30 years later as *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: The Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive Pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal Hidden in the Koran under Earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*.

73 Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, 4th ed., which is translated as *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, and debated in C. Burgmer (ed.), *Streit um den Koran*.

74 Rodinson, *Muhammed*, 343–6.

75 Thus Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*; and Powers, *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men*.

76 Thus Nagel, *Mohammed*, which is translated as *Mahomet*; Jansen, *Mohammed: Eine Biographie*; Lo Jacono, *Maometto*; Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad*; Brockopp (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*.

These and other signs of the efflorescence of Islamic studies are difficult to imagine absent the critical turn effected in the 1970s and 1980s. A generation ago, the essential soundness of the early Islamic historical and biographical traditions was self-evident, and at the center of the Orientalist tradition such criticism as took place amounted to little more than filtering obvious anachronisms, and reconciling or harmonizing inconsistencies and contradictions. It is testimony to the persuasiveness of the revisionist critique that writing Prophetic biography in a conventional sense – that is, by re-narrativizing *sīra* episodes – no longer occupies the center of the field; it is left to popularizers or scholars writing in a popularizing mode. As far as the historiography of early Islam is concerned, the burden of proof has shifted decisively: what was once effortlessly assumed is now painstakingly documented.⁷⁷ In fact, much of what was radical in the 1970s and early 1980s is now middle-of-the-road, the radical fringe now occupied by those who deny what so-called revisionists freely concede, e.g., that Muhammad existed or that the conquests took place.⁷⁸ It is largely due to the skeptical turn that the once-sleepy field of early Islamic historiography has changed beyond recognition,⁷⁹ and so, too, the study of early Islamic documentary and material culture (e.g., archeology, epigraphy, papyrology, and numismatics). It is upon the basis of such sources that matters once settled (such as the nature of the earliest Islamic state) are now subject to stimulating controversy.⁸⁰

Needless to say, some of what is written about Islam has created more heat than it has light. To serve a broad audience of non-Islamicists Crone has

77 For examples of the painstaking work now being undertaken in the hope of establishing the authenticity of *sīra* narratives, see Motzki, “The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Huqayq”; Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*; Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte über das Leben Muhammads*. That such attempts are successful should not be taken as granted; for one set of recent criticisms, see Shoemaker, “In Search of ‘Urwa’s Sīra.”

78 For an early example, Koren and Nevo, “Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies”; for a recent one, Popp, “The Early History of Islam.”

79 For years the standard had been Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*; an incomplete list of recent monographs focusing on the early period includes Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing*; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*; Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*; Schöller, *Exegetisches Denken und Prophetenbiographie*; and Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*.

80 The bibliography is huge, but two complementary examples are Johns, “Archaeology and the History of Early Islam,” and Hoyland, “New Documentary Texts and the History of the Early Islamic State.” The intra-Islamicist kerfuffle about the Nessana evidence should now be evaluated in the light of Ruffini, “Village Life and Family Power in Late Antique Nessana.”

written online and commissioned works of *haute vulgarisation*,⁸¹ thus implicitly or explicitly arguing against ignorance, willful or otherwise. She has always been as generous as she is uncompromising in her comments on the work of students and colleagues,⁸² but it is tempting as well to infer from the sparer prose and lighter referencing in some of her more recent work an attempt to deliver sophisticated Islamic history to non-Islamicists curious about the pre-modern background to contemporary events. This is explicitly the case of *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, which, tracing a 600-year evolution from Muḥammad to the Mongols, is something of a summa of 30 years' work. Accommodating "political thought" in an expansive sense so as to include sectarianism, politics, political theory, law, theology (and much more besides), it subsumes an extraordinary array of sources and problems, and traces the contentious but nearly always consistent attempt to engineer a theocracy that expressed Muslims' possession of both "truth and power."⁸³ As much as *Slaves on Horses* made Wellhausen's work on the Umayyad caliphate obsolete, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* is the first sustained study that makes political, religious, and ideological sense of Islamic history. The book's implications for modern Islamic thinking are not inconsiderable, and so leave no doubt that the present converses with the past.

What, then, is the responsibility of the scholar, especially one who claims to know a distant and seminal past? Liberal societies require "truthful inquiry," as B. Williams reminds us, which can take "myths to pieces."⁸⁴ One answer that she gives is to insist on the primacy of evidence and the difficulty of reaching conclusions. We might well wish the early Islamic community to have been ecumenical, but that does not make it so.⁸⁵ We might wish to prove that the leather trade was key to Qurashī wealth, but at present the model is better than the evidence.⁸⁶ Another, perhaps less obvious answer issues directly from the historicizing project itself. For the scholar, what better way to reduce the "tension" between "historian and believer" than to highlight the constructed

⁸¹ Crone serves as General Editor of the "Makers of the Muslim World" series of biographies (Oneworld); for a list of published volumes, see <http://www.oneworld-publications.com/series/makers-of-the-muslim-world>.

⁸² Everyone has a story, and mine, which is typical, has her responding to a long and undisciplined draft article within 36 hours – with three single-spaced pages of comments. Much to my embarrassment, she understood my intended argument better than I did.

⁸³ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 16.

⁸⁴ Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 265.

⁸⁵ As she argues in her review of Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* at <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/42023/among-the-believers>.

⁸⁶ Crone, "Quraysh and the Roman Army."

and contingent nature of orthodoxy in general and the Sunni synthesis in particular?⁸⁷ Here it should be recalled that the process of harmonizing inconsistencies and contradictions that produced the master narrative of Islamic history, more-or-less faithfully recapitulated by the majority of Western historians until a generation ago, was fundamental to Sunni success, not least of all because it was so radical. For not only was controversy to be forgotten and the process that created consensus obscured by the onset of “collective amnesia”;⁸⁸ it is also the case that hermeneutical techniques were put in place to routinize the harmonization of contradictions and inconsistencies, such as the imposition of Tradition upon Scripture.⁸⁹ History as description is one thing, and history as prescription something else; when the two are confused, sometimes it takes a correspondingly radical reappraisal to set things right. And Crone’s contribution – that ongoing project of comprehensive disambiguation – aims at precisely that.

So more than any other scholar, it is thanks to her that historians are finally doing their subject justice. We may – or *should* – disagree about the precise causes and vectors of change, but one can hardly disagree with P. Brown that early Islam constituted “the last, most rapid crisis in the religious history of the Late Antique period.”⁹⁰ Highly controversial, inventive and experimental, the project that Muslims set for themselves was as ambitious as it was unimaginable. How is one to make sense of it or draw proper lessons from it without asking fundamental questions about how it came to be?

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⁸⁷ This highlighting project cuts across virtually the entirety of her published work; for “ten-sion,” see Crone, “No Compulsion in Religion,” especially at 162.

⁸⁸ As good an example as any being the so-called “four-caliph thesis,” which not only went some way towards reconciling Sunni and Shi’ite views, but also defanged God’s caliph; see Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*.

⁸⁹ Crone, “No Compulsion in Religion,” 164–5.

⁹⁰ Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150–750*, 189; cf. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, where the debt to Brown, Crone, and Cook is made explicit.

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